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**ABSTRACT**

Results are presented from the first interim assessment of the School Improvement Project conducted by the Documentation Unit of the Metropolitan Educational Development and Research Project. The primary goal of the project is to assist participating schools in the processes of self-improvement through the establishment of a school-based planning committee representing the various constituencies making up the school. Democratic school community participation and decision-making are emphasized. The attention of the participants is directed to instructional, curricular, and administrative needs of the schools through the practice of ongoing planning and evaluation. The focus of the assessment was the activities of the first year of program implementation in New York City schools. The organizational location, funding, objectives, activities, and staffing of the project are discussed, followed by a description of the Documentation Unit and the methodology of the interim project assessment. (Author/GK)

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT  
FIRST ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT  
AUGUST 1980

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This report will present the results of the first interim assessment of the School Improvement Project conducted in May-June 1980 by the Documentation Unit of the Metropolitan Educational Development and Research Project. The focus of the assessment was the activities of the School Improvement Project during the 1979-80 school year, the first year of program implementation in New York City schools.<sup>1</sup> In this first chapter of the report, the organizational location, funding, objectives, activities, and staffing of the School Improvement Project will be discussed, followed by a description of the Documentation Unit and the methodology of the interim project assessment.

### The School Improvement Project

The School Improvement Project is a program developed and administered by the central administration of the New York City Public Schools. During the 1979-80 fiscal year, while located within the Office of Educational Evaluation, the project administrators reported directly to the Senior Assistant to the Chancellor for Instruction. In July, 1980, the project was relocated in the newly formed Division of Curriculum and Instruction. While the Division of Curriculum and Instruction will be responsible for providing the project with administrative, personnel and other organizational services, the project administrators will continue to report directly to the Senior Assistant to the Chancellor.

Funding for the School Improvement Project over the 1979-80 fiscal year was provided with \$810,000 in State Education Department grants: a

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<sup>1</sup>Conceptual reports dealing with the process of organizational development and change in the New York City school system will also be prepared by the Documentation Unit.

\$400,000 Title IV-C Planning Grant and a \$410,000 portion of the State Incentive Grant. It is anticipated that the project will be funded at about this level for a three to five year period. The Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation also awarded the project grants of \$140,000 and \$175,000 respectively, to support the technical assistance component of the program over the next two to three years. Technical assistance activities include the purchase and channeling of instructional materials and supplies and consultant services.

The primary goal of the School Improvement Project is to assist participating schools in the process of self-improvement through the establishment of a school-based planning committee representing the various constituencies making up the school. The planning committee is responsible for the development of a School Improvement Plan which addresses the school's assessed needs in the five factor areas identified by Edmonds<sup>2</sup> as characterizing more effective schools. The five factor areas are administrative style, instructional emphasis on basic skills, school climate, ongoing assessment of pupil progress, and teacher expectations.

A school liaison is assigned to each school to actively assist in the needs assessment, committee formation, and plan development phases of the program. Upon completion of the school plan, the liaison acts in a supportive capacity. He or she assists the school in implementing the activities outlined in the plan, by closely monitoring the implementation process and by facilitating the delivery of resources and services

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<sup>2</sup>Ronald Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," Educational Leadership, October, 1979, pp. 15-27.

provided by the project, central Board, District Offices, and the State Education Department.

The first-year objectives of the project were the following:

(1) to identify public and non-public elementary schools for participation in the School Improvement Project; (2) to develop school assessment instruments and conduct data collection activities to assist schools in identifying strengths and weaknesses within the five school effectiveness areas; (3) to develop an improvement plan in each participating school through a school constituency planning process; (4) to implement the activities and strategies described in each School Improvement Plan; and (5) to assess the project's support to the schools and the success of improvement plan activities.

A brief overview of project activities conducted to achieve each of the five objectives is provided below. Project activities are described in greater detail, along with specific dates of occurrence, in a report, "School Improvement Project - State Education Department Annual Evaluation Report," prepared by the Documentation Unit in August, 1980.

#### Project Objectives

School selection. The original project plan called for the selection of twenty public and two non-public elementary schools. However, due to budgetary restrictions and a desire to provide greater equity in the participation of non-public schools, schools in the project during 1979-80 included ten public and four non-public elementary schools.

The following criteria were used by the project administrators in selecting schools: (1) the voluntary participation of the principal and

the approval of the District Superintendent; (2) agreement between the perceived needs of the schools and the program activities of the School Improvement Project; and (3) the absence of any other school development program operating in the school. In selecting public schools for participation, the project attempted to achieve a representative cross-section of schools in terms of size of pupil population, pupil socioeconomic status, pupil ethnic composition, and school standing in the citywide ranking of elementary schools based on the annual reading achievement test. In addition, to secure the participation of as many community school districts as possible, only one school per district was accepted to participate in the first year of program implementation.

The selected ten public and four non-public schools were located in diverse neighborhoods throughout New York City's five boroughs. Three schools were in Manhattan (East and Central Harlem, Inwood), one school was in the South Bronx, six schools were in Brooklyn (East New York, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Sheepshead Bay, Red Hook, Marine Park), three schools were in Queens (Hollis, Bayside, Kew Gardens), and one school was in the Clifton community of Staten Island. A representative cross-section of public schools was also achieved with school registers ranging from 349 to 1,378 students. From 8.9% to 86.6% of the pupil populations were considered low-income, and school ethnic compositions ranged from 11.7% to 96.7% Black, 2.8% to 77.2% Hispanic, 0.9% to 77.6% White, and 0.0% to 4.8% Asian. In terms of their standing in the citywide reading achievement ranking of the 634 elementary schools, the public schools ranged from a low of approximately 75 (almost all



pupils reading at or above grade level) to a high of well over 600 (a large majority of pupils reading below grade level). Six of the ten schools ranged from 400 to 600 in their citywide ranks.

Assessment and data collection activities. In the summer of 1979, the Documentation Unit and project staff developed the school needs assessment methodology for the program. Interview schedules (Principal, Assistant Principal, Classroom Teacher, Special Program Teacher, Para-professional, Auxiliary Staff, and Parent), a Teacher's Questionnaire, and a school building and grounds observational assessment form were the instruments developed. In addition, reading and math achievement test information and various pupil and school statistical data were collected for each school for the five-year period prior to introduction of the program.

Needs assessment data collection activities were conducted by the liaisons from mid-October to mid-December in the public schools, and over the months of January and February in the non-public schools. A Needs Assessment Report was prepared by the liaisons for their assigned schools. The report presented the strengths and weaknesses of the school in each of the five school effectiveness areas. These reports were shared with the public schools in February, and with the non-public schools in late spring.

The Needs Assessment Report was to serve as a guide in establishing school priorities to be addressed in the school's improvement plan. To maintain the confidentiality of assessment results, the report was distributed and collected following meetings of the school planning committee, and a copy was made available in the liaison's office. The



report could be read by appointment by members of the school community. Other than the personal copies of the principal and the liaison, and the copies distributed and collected at committee meetings, the report was not reproduced or distributed.

Improvement plan development. A school planning committee, consisting of the principal, the assigned school liaison, the UFT Chapter Chairperson, and representatives of all constituencies of the school, was formed at each of the participating public schools in February, 1980. Each committee, under the direction of the principal and with the support of the liaison, met on a regular basis through June to develop its School Improvement Plan. The plan presents activities and strategies designed to meet the assessed needs of the school. While drawing on the resources and personnel of the school, the plan includes requests for outside services and materials, if they are necessary and available. It also includes an evaluation design for each component of the plan.

Eight public schools completed a draft improvement plan and submitted it to school staff and parents, the project administration, and the Title IV-C Advisory Committee<sup>3</sup> for review and comments. In early September, 1980, the plans will also be reviewed by the District Superintendent, and when appropriate, the local Community School Board.

In early June, one of the non-public schools decided that the planning committee would be a "committee of the whole" because of the small staff size (twelve staff members). Two of the other non-public

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<sup>3</sup>The Title IV-C Advisory Committee is the citywide project review panel mandated by State Education Department guidelines. The committee, which includes representatives of the supervisory and teachers' unions, the State Education Department, participating non-public school agencies, the Community Superintendents' Association, the Public Education Association, the United Parents' Association, and the Office of Educational Evaluation, is responsible for reviewing and advising School Improvement Project policies and activities.

schools will form their committees in September. These three schools will begin planning meetings in the fall.

Plan implementation. Due to the length of time required to complete the needs assessment and planning activities, none of the participating schools was able to begin implementation of improvement plan activities in the fall, 1980. It is anticipated that the three non-public schools and one additional public school will have completed plans and be prepared to implement them in January, 1981.

The principal and planning committee at each school will be responsible for implementing the activities described in their plan. The liaison will be available to provide advice and expertise to the committee, and to serve as a contact person in the engagement of outside resources and services for the school. The liaison will also monitor and maintain a record of the implementation of the improvement plan.

Project assessment. The Documentation Unit is responsible for conducting an ongoing evaluation of the School Improvement Project. This report presents the findings of the Unit's assessment of year one of the project.

In addition to the first interim assessment survey conducted by the Documentation Unit in May and June 1980, evaluation activities included the preparation of evaluation profiles for each school utilizing the school needs assessment data as a pre-program evaluation measure. The unit also maintained a file of daily school liaison logs, collected baseline math and reading achievement test data by school, and assisted schools in developing the evaluation activities of their improvement plans.

Analysis of the initial success of individual improvement plans will be conducted next year, following the implementation of the plan activities. Liaison logs, project staff and participant interviews, and the results of the evaluation activities outlined in the plans will be used for this analysis.

#### Staffing

Staff of the School Improvement Project over the 1979-80 school year included a project director, a project manager, twelve school liaisons, a senior evaluation specialist, a resource specialist, an office analyst, and a stenographer/secretary. The functions of the project director, project manager, and stenographer/secretary are self-evident, and the role of the school liaison has been described previously. Therefore, only the functions of the other staff positions will be described below.

The major responsibilities of the senior evaluation specialist included the following: proposal development; developing, evaluating, and assisting in-service staff training; expediting written communication flow; and communication of the process and program objectives of the School Improvement Project in response to outside inquiries.

Functions of the resource specialist included these: (1) the identification of potential central school administration, State Education Department, District Office, university, business, and non-profit resources and technical assistance services to address the needs discussed in individual improvement plans; (2) establishment of a pool of eligible consultants to assist in the implementation of improvement

plans; (3) contact with publishers who would conduct workshops at individual schools to apprise staffs of educational products and resources; and (4) mediation between the project schools and the central Board of Education by helping to expedite needed equipment and physical plant repairs, hastening the delivery of delayed supplies and instructional materials, and assisting the flow of important memoranda and documents.

The office analyst functioned as the project office manager and acted as an administrative consultant to project schools regarding school office management, paper flow, and District Office and central Board reporting systems.

#### Current Status of Participating Schools

In the early fall of 1979, ten public and four non-public elementary schools were selected to participate in the School Improvement Project. The current status of these schools is described below.

Public schools. One of the ten original public schools dropped out of the project during the early stages of the process, shortly after the Needs Assessment Report was completed and the planning committee had been formed. Another school suspended committee meetings over the issue of the dissemination of the Needs Assessment Report; this school decided to resume committee meetings this fall. One other school raised serious concerns regarding the narrative format of the Needs Assessment Report; this school temporarily suspended committee meetings but resumed meetings when they received a statistical presentation of the results of their school needs assessment.

This last school and the seven other public schools continued committee meetings through June, 1980, each completing a draft improvement



plan by the end of that month. These eight schools will begin implementation of plan activities in the fall. The other school that had suspended committee meetings will be developing an improvement plan in the fall.

Non-public schools. One of the four participating non-public schools decided, in the spring of 1980, not to continue in the project because of the anticipated departure of the principal in June and a turnover of five of the eight staff members in the fall. The other three non-public schools have continued in the project. One of these three schools has formed a planning committee of the whole staff and will be involved in plan development and implementation during the coming school year. The other two non-public schools will be involved in committee formation in the fall, and will then begin plan development and plan activity implementation. In addition, another non-public school will be selected to begin participation in the fall, 1980 to replace the school that left the project.

School participation: School year 1980-81. In addition to nine of the original ten public schools, three of the original four non-public schools, and one replacement non-public school, seven newly-selected public schools are expected to join the project, bringing the number of participating schools to twenty.

#### The Documentation Unit

The Documentation Unit is a component of the Metropolitan Educational Development and Research Project located within the Office of Educational Evaluation, New York City Board of Education. The Unit is



funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation to document the development and implementation of the School Improvement Project and to provide formative evaluation and technical assistance support services to the project.

The documentation function of the Unit involves maintaining an ongoing record of the development and progress of the project. This is accomplished through the collection of daily logs (liaison summaries and analyses of project activities in their assigned schools), minutes of School Improvement Committee meetings, notes on meetings of project staff and participating principals, school building and pupil statistical data, and significant project documents.

The Unit has provided technical assistance to the project in a variety of areas, particularly the following: in the development of project documentation methodologies; in needs assessment instrument design, analysis procedures, and report format; and in individual School Improvement Plan evaluation strategies.

The formative evaluation services of the Documentation Unit have included ongoing consultation and feedback at project staff meetings, and interim assessments of project activities. This report describes the results of the first interim project assessment conducted in May and June, 1980 following the first school year of program implementation.

#### First Interim Assessment Methodology: Data Collection

The data collection activities consisted of interviews with participating school principals, school liaisons, and the two project administrators, and the distribution of questionnaires to members of each

School Improvement Committee and other members of the school community (administrators, staff, parents) not serving on the committee. All interviews were conducted by Documentation Unit staff. Questionnaires were distributed and collected in the schools by the assigned liaisons.

Personal interviews. Three structured interview schedules were prepared (for use with the project administrators, liaisons and principals), and these contained questions which comprehensively addressed all aspects of the project: school selection and project introduction, needs assessment, School Improvement Committee formation, committee meetings, plan development and plan implementation, liaison training, project support, communication, and project strengths and weaknesses. Liaisons and principals responded only to those questions pertaining to project phases completed at their schools. In one school where there had been a mid-year change in liaison assignment, the two liaisons were asked to respond only to those questions dealing with project phases completed during their assignment in the school. In another school, where two liaisons were assigned as a team, each liaison responded independently to all questions. Completion time on the three interview forms varied. The project administrator interviews took approximately two-and-one-half-hours, liaison interviews averaged two hours in duration, and principal interviews took approximately one hour to complete.

Questionnaires. The 23-item Planning Committee Questionnaire and the 14-item School Questionnaire were relatively short survey instruments consisting of forced-choice (yes or no) questions, with space provided below each question for further elaboration of the response, and one open-ended question regarding suggestions for project modification. Both questionnaires included items pertaining to the various project phases as

they had been implemented in the school. The Planning Committee Questionnaire included some additional questions about committee meetings and activities and plan development, which were not included in the School Questionnaire. Respondents were instructed to skip those questionnaire items pertaining to project phases which had not been completed in their schools.

Assessment participants. This report is based on information concerning project activities in eleven schools, including all ten public schools that participated in the School Improvement Project and one of the four participating non-public schools. Ten principals, nine from public schools and one from a non-public school, were interviewed. One public school principal whose school had left the project early in the process was not interviewed.

Although twelve liaisons were interviewed, further elaboration of the liaison interview process is necessary. While twelve individual liaisons were interviewed, thirteen interviews pertaining to eleven schools were actually conducted. A clearer explanation of this statement is provided by the following description of the liaison interviews:

- . Seven liaisons were interviewed regarding project activities at their assigned schools.
- . One liaison was interviewed regarding project activities in one of his four assigned non-public schools.
- . Two liaisons working as a team were interviewed independently regarding project activities in their assigned school.
- . One liaison was interviewed regarding initial project activities in his assigned school prior to re-assignment to perform central project office duties.

. One liaison was interviewed twice--once regarding project activities in one school which suspended program implementation following initial planning committee meetings, and once regarding project activities that he implemented following re-assignment to the school described in the last statement.

Questionnaires were distributed to eight School Improvement Committees and the eight corresponding school communities. Questionnaires were only distributed to those schools with functioning planning committees. Three schools did not have functioning planning committees: one school had suspended project activities following initial committee meetings; one school had left the project immediately following the formation of the committee; and the non-public school committee had not begun meeting.

Tables 1 and 2 present the number and percent of respondents to the Planning Committee and the School Questionnaires for each of the eight schools, and for all of the schools combined. In addition, a breakdown of the number of administrators, classroom teachers, special program teachers, parents, and auxiliary staff who responded to each questionnaire is provided. Overall, the percentage of planning committee members who responded to the questionnaire was high, as indicated in Table 3. Between 38.7% and 86.7% of the committee members completed the questionnaire in individual schools.

The number of individuals in each school who responded to the School Questionnaire ranged from a low of three to a high of forty-six. However, in most schools, the number of respondents ranged from 22 to 33. Because liaisons were instructed to distribute the School Questionnaire only to those staff members and parents who were not on the planning



**Table 1**  
**Respondents to the Planning Committee Questionnaire**

| School        | Percentage of Respondents (n) * |                    |                          |          |                 |            |
|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------------|------------|
|               | Administrators                  | Classroom Teachers | Special Program Teachers | Parents  | Auxiliary Staff | Total      |
| 01            | 10.0 (1)                        | 50.0 (5)           | 30.0 (3)                 | 0.0 (0)  | 10.0 (1)        | 100.0 (10) |
| 02            | 10.0 (1)                        | 30.0 (3)           | 30.0 (3)                 | 20.0 (2) | 10.0 (1)        | 100.0 (10) |
| 03            | 21.4 (3)                        | 35.7 (5)           | 28.6 (4)                 | 0.0 (0)  | 14.3 (2)        | 100.0 (14) |
| 04            | 0.0 (0)                         | 46.2 (6)           | 23.1 (3)                 | 15.4 (2) | 15.4 (2)        | 100.0 (13) |
| 05            | 8.3 (1)                         | 41.7 (5)           | 33.3 (4)                 | 8.3 (1)  | 8.3 (1)         | 100.0 (12) |
| 06            | 0.0 (0)                         | 71.4 (5)           | 14.3 (1)                 | 0.0 (0)  | 14.3 (1)        | 100.0 (7)  |
| 07            | 0.0 (0)                         | 60.0 (3)           | 20.0 (1)                 | 0.0 (0)  | 20.0 (1)        | 100.0 (5)  |
| 08            | 12.5 (1)                        | 12.5 (1)           | 50.0 (4)                 | 12.5 (1) | 12.5 (1)        | 100.0 (8)  |
| Total % (N)** | 8.9 (7)                         | 41.8 (33)          | 29.1 (23)                | 7.6 (6)  | 12.7 (10)       | 100.0 (79) |

\* Percentage and number (n) of respondents within each school returning the questionnaire.

\*\* Percentage and number (N) of respondents for all schools combined returning the questionnaire.



Table 2  
Respondents to the School Questionnaire

| School            | Percentage of Respondents (n)* |                    |                          |         |                 |             |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|
|                   | Administrators                 | Classroom Teachers | Special Program Teachers | Parents | Auxiliary Staff | Total       |
| 01                | 0.0 (0)                        | 16.7 (5)           | 20.0 (6)                 | 6.7 (2) | 56.7 (17)       | 100.0 (30)  |
| 02                | 0.0 (0)                        | 66.7 (2)           | 33.3 (1)                 | 0.0 (0) | 0.0 (0)         | 100.0 (3)   |
| 03                | 0.0 (0)                        | 36.7 (11)          | 10.0 (3)                 | 0.0 (0) | 53.3 (16)       | 100.0 (30)  |
| 04                | 0.0 (0)                        | 54.5 (18)          | 33.3 (11)                | 0.0 (0) | 12.1 (4)        | 100.0 (33)  |
| 05                | 0.0 (0)                        | 50.0 (12)          | 25.0 (6)                 | 0.0 (0) | 25.0 (6)        | 100.0 (24)  |
| 06                | 0.0 (0)                        | 37.5 (3)           | 37.5 (3)                 | 0.0 (0) | 25.0 (2)        | 100.0 (8)   |
| 07                | 0.0 (0)                        | 22.7 (5)           | 31.8 (7)                 | 0.0 (0) | 45.5 (10)       | 100.0 (22)  |
| 08                | 4.3 (2)                        | 19.6 (9)           | 43.5 (20)                | 4.3 (2) | 28.3 (13)       | 100.0 (46)  |
| Total %<br>(N) ** | 1.0 (2)                        | 33.2 (65)          | 29.1 (57)                | 2.0 (4) | 34.7 (68)       | 100.0 (196) |

\* Percentage and number (n) of respondents within each school returning the questionnaire.

\*\* Percentage and number (N) of respondents for all schools combined returning the questionnaire.

Table 3

## Rate of Return of the Planning Committee Questionnaire

| School | Total Number<br>of Respondents | Total Number of<br>Planning Committee<br>Members | Rate of Return<br>(%) |
|--------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1      | 10                             | 13                                               | 76.9                  |
| 2      | 10                             | 13                                               | 76.9                  |
| 3      | 14                             | 19                                               | 73.7                  |
| 4      | 13                             | 15                                               | 86.7                  |
| 5      | 12                             | 19                                               | 63.2                  |
| 6      | 7                              | 16                                               | 43.8                  |
| 7      | 5                              | 13                                               | 38.7                  |
| 8      | 8                              | 13                                               | 61.5                  |
| Total  | 79                             | 121                                              | 65.3                  |

committee but who did have some knowledge of the project, there was great variation in the number of completed School Questionnaires. It was difficult, therefore, to estimate the return rates for this questionnaire.

#### First Interim Assessment Methodology: Data Analysis

Interview and questionnaire results were analyzed by the Documentation Unit. Detailed, preliminary analyses of the results were provided to project administrators for their immediate use approximately one month after data collection. This report represents a further analysis and interpretation of these results.

Interview data were content analyzed. Detailed response categories were developed for each question on the various interview forms (project administrator, liaison, principal). Individual responses were then classified within these categories, and the number and percentage of responses falling into each category were recorded.

Questionnaire responses were analyzed by first calculating the number and percentage of "No Answer" responses and then calculating the number and percentage of "Yes" and "No" responses based on the remaining total. Thus the percentages of "Yes" and "No" responses are based on the total number of individuals who actually answered the question. The number and percentages of "No Answers" and "Yes" and "No" responses were calculated for each school individually, and for all schools combined. Tables summarizing the questionnaire results were also provided to the project administrators and liaisons.

The interview and questionnaire results are summarized and integrated in this report. Most of the results of the interview content analyses are presented here in summary form, including many detailed examples of

responses. The questionnaire results are generally presented by reporting the percentage of respondents from all schools combined who answered a question in a particular way, followed by the range of responses to the item from individual schools. The "all schools combined" figure indicates the average response, and the range provides an indication of whether or not this average response is generally characteristic of the response received at individual schools.

Report format. This report includes the following chapters on each project phase: school selection and project introduction, needs assessment, committee formation, plan development, and plan implementation. These chapters are followed by chapters on liaison training, project support and communication, and project strengths and weaknesses. The final chapter contains a brief review of the results of the previous chapters and presents conclusions and recommendations based on the assessment data and the observations of the Documentation Unit as it closely monitored the progress of the project over the year. All available information from interviews (project administrator, liaison and principal) and questionnaires (Planning Committee and School) is summarized and reported in each chapter.

This report is based on a cross-sectional view of the schools during each project phase, rather than a longitudinal look at schools. While small sample sizes make rigorous statistical analyses of the data impossible, trends and consistent themes in the responses of project staff and school participants clearly identify the accomplishments and problematic aspects of each phase of the program.



## II. SCHOOL SELECTION AND PROJECT INTRODUCTION

### School Selection

In late June, 1979, a Chancellor's Memorandum introducing the School Improvement Project was circulated to the city's 32 Community School Board Presidents, District Superintendents and all school principals. The memorandum included a detailed description of the project and an application for participation in the program. The application was to be signed by the building principal and the District Superintendent, and the principal was simply required to check a box indicating his or her desire to be considered for project participation.

From a pool of 43 schools (representing 22 community school districts) interested in participation, ten schools were selected by the project administrators. The following were the selection criteria:

- 1) the voluntary participation of the principal;
- 2) the absence of other major school development programs operating in the school;
- 3) the representativeness of the sample selected (Project schools were to comprise a cross-section of the city's elementary schools based on the size of pupil register, the percentage of low-income pupils, the ethnic composition of the pupil population, and their reading achievement levels as measured by the annual citywide achievement tests.); and
- 4) the participation of a maximum number of districts (Initially, only one school per district was selected for participation.).

The ten principals were notified in September, 1979, that their schools were accepted into the project. Small group or individual

meetings were held between the project administrators and the principals in early October. At these meetings the program was described, questions were answered, and principals were introduced to the liaisons assigned to their schools. Following the meetings, liaisons began to implement activities in their schools.

The introduction of the project to the three participating non-public school agencies was handled in a different manner. Meetings were held in the late fall with representatives of the Diocese of Brooklyn, the Archdiocese of New York, and the Board of Jewish Education. The written project description which had been circulated in June, 1979, was shared and discussed. The non-public school representatives then notified their individual schools about the program.

The project administrators held a meeting with all interested non-public school principals in January, 1980. The project was described in detail, and the non-public school liaison followed this meeting up with a visit to those principals who continued to express interest in the project. In the first year of the program, three schools from the Diocese of Brooklyn and one school from the Board of Jewish Education were included in the project. These four schools were served by a single liaison due to State Education funding regulations.

#### Role of Staff and Parents in the Decision to Participate

The ten principals interviewed indicated that staff did not have any significant input in the decision to participate in the project. Three principals mentioned that there was insufficient time between the acceptance of the school into the project and the start-up activities, or initially, between the notification of the project in the Chancellor's

Memorandum and the submission of the project application in June. One principal stated that he sought feedback from staff members regarding their desire to participate before the introduction of program activities in October. This principal said that he would not have continued with the project at that point had the staff not been supportive.

Only in one case did a principal report that parents had input regarding school participation prior to the submission of the project application. In this case, the Parent Association president requested that the District Superintendent allow the school to participate. In two other schools, principals held meetings with parents immediately following acceptance into the program. There appeared to be little opportunity for principals to seek significant input from parents, except, in some cases, after the school had actually been accepted into the program.

In responding to the Planning Committee Questionnaire, 57.1% of the committee members (all schools combined) indicated that the school community had adequate input into the decision to participate in the School Improvement Project. The proportion of committee members by individual school who indicated that they had had adequate input ranged from a low of 11.1% to a high of 80.0%.

Sixty-six percent (66.3%) of the respondents to the School Questionnaire (all schools combined) believed that the school community had had adequate input into the decision to participate. In individual schools, this perception was reported by as many as 73.3%, and by as few as 33.3% of the respondents.

### District Superintendent Participation in School Selection

Interviews with project administrators and principals revealed that the role of Superintendents in selection of schools for participation was very limited. A meeting was held in August, 1979, at the central Board of Education, to describe the project to representatives of the Superintendents and Executive Directors of central Board offices. (Overall, turnout for the meeting was only fair.) Actual Superintendent input in school selection in most cases involved signing-off on project applications submitted by schools in their district.

One principal reported that the Superintendent presented and discussed the project at a District Principals' Conference and then solicited volunteers. Unofficially, a few principals claimed that they had received some pressure from their District Office to join the project.

In summary, although questionnaire responses seemed to indicate that the majority of staff and parents felt satisfied with their input into the decision to participate in the project, the actual decision rested with the principal and the project administrators. District Superintendents also did not seem to play a major role in school selection.

### Initial Reactions to the Project

#### Principal

In discussing the initial reaction of the principals to the School Improvement Project, eight of the principals were described by the liaisons as supportive of the program, and two principals were described as unsupportive. When asked what they believed their principals' initial expectations were for the project, eight liaisons said that principals believed the project would provide resources (materials, personnel,



special services, etc.) to the school, while four liaisons reported that their principals were seeking help in improving reading achievement in the schools. Three mentioned their principals' interest in having the school assessed, two felt the principals were looking for leadership assistance and one liaison mentioned the principal's desire to initiate a comprehensive school planning effort.

Principals gave the following reasons for initial interest in the project: need for overall improvement in the schools (n=4); supplies and resources for the school (n=3); desire for a project which would help improve reading in the school (n=3); interest in a school evaluation by an objective outsider (n=3); development of a comprehensive plan (n=1); assistance in dealing with the changing school population (n=1); and parents desire to have the project in the school (n=1).

#### Staff

Although four liaisons described the initial staff reaction to the project as being generally positive, eight liaisons felt that staff reaction was initially unfavorable. Most of these eight liaisons described staff as being uncertain, one stated that staff reaction was apathetic, and one liaison stated that staff was afraid. It appears from liaison responses that this unfavorable reaction was largely due to the lack of staff knowledge about the goals of the project and the general absence of staff involvement in the decision to participate.

Five of the principals reported favorable initial staff reaction to the project, while five felt that staff reaction was initially unfavorable. Four of the principals who perceived an unfavorable staff response described staff reactions as being suspicious, uncertain, or skeptical.



Again, this type of staff response may be due to the absence of staff orientation and feedback sessions prior to initiation of project activities in the schools.

### Parents

Seven liaisons felt that initial parental reaction to the project was favorable, largely because of the opportunity for an assessment of the school by an outsider, or because of the possibility of gaining resources for the school. Four liaisons described parent reaction as uncertain (n=2), skeptical (n=1), or angry because parents thought the liaison was conducting research on the children (n=1). One liaison said that parents had no initial reaction or expectations regarding the project.

Eight of the ten principals described initial parent reaction as positive. One principal stated that parents had had initial reservations about the project; however, these were discussed with the project administrators and the assigned liaison. (One principal did not answer this question.)

### Project and Liaison Introduction at the School

Nine liaisons stated that they were formally introduced in their assigned schools at a faculty conference, usually within the first week after their arrival. At these conferences, the project was described and questions were answered. Three of these liaisons were also informally introduced to individual staff. Three liaisons reported that there was no formal initial introduction of themselves or the project to the staff. These liaisons met staff individually or in small groups on a "catch-as-catch-can" basis.

### Significant Problems During School Selection/Project Introduction

Seven of the twelve liaisons stated that there were no significant problems in their schools during this introductory phase of the project. The following issues were mentioned by the five liaisons who reported experiencing problems during this phase: initial resistance to the project because of the absence of staff input in the decision to participate (n=2); initial anxiety on the principals' part concerning the project process (n=2); staff fear that the project would interfere with another program already in operation in the school (n=1); and the lack of a work space for the liaison (n=1).

### Suggestions for Modification

#### School Selection

When asked for any recommendations for modification of the process of school selection, almost all of the liaisons (n=10) stated that full knowledge of the project, involvement in the decision to participate in the project, and commitment to the project by all school constituencies were necessary. The project administrators also mentioned that initial project orientation sessions with all school constituencies, and the seeking of school community commitment to the project were significant program features absent from the original school selection process. The administrators mentioned that these modifications had already been incorporated into the selection procedure which was used in choosing a second group of schools for project participation in the fall, 1980.

Other modifications to the school selection process were suggested by liaisons: selecting new project schools based on reading scores (n=2); broadening the pool from which the second round of project schools

would be selected (n=2); communicating regularly with principals actively awaiting participation in the project (n=2); contacting District Office personnel regarding schools under consideration for project participation (n=1); improving research on schools seeking participation in the project (n=1); and revising the project description into a booklet format which is less technical than the description used (n=1).

#### Initial Project Introduction

When asked for suggestions for modifying the manner in which the project and/or the liaison is initially introduced to the school, five liaisons cited the need for a meeting with the entire school staff to explain the project and answer questions. Two liaisons stated that initial meetings between the liaison and principal were necessary. A meeting between the project administrators, District Office personnel, and the school principal prior to the liaison's entering the school was suggested by two liaisons as a means of increasing the coordination of district and project delivery of resources to the school.

Two liaisons felt that they should start with informal visits to the school, to develop trust and rapport between themselves and the staff, and to gauge the staff's and principal's feelings regarding project participation. One liaison stated that schools need a better understanding of the more "threatening" areas of the needs assessment, i.e. administrative style and teacher expectations. One liaison felt that the principal should be provided with guidelines by the project on how to introduce the liaison to the school.

In most cases, the formal introduction of the liaison and the project to the school took place at a faculty conference within the

first week of the liaison's assignment. In a few schools, no formal or group introduction of the liaison was made.

The majority of liaisons indicated that they had had no significant problems during the introductory phase of the project. However, where problems are cited, they appear to be largely a result of faulty perceptions of the project and staff resentment over the absence of input into the decision to participate in the program.

In suggesting modifications of the school selection process, the project administrators and almost all of the liaisons felt that it was crucial that the school constituencies have full knowledge of the project, have input into the school participation decision, and demonstrate commitment to the program. In regard to the initial introduction of the liaison and project to the school, many liaisons recommended that initial orientation meetings between the project and the school communities be held to clarify the program design and prepare schools for the implementation of activities.



### III. SCHOOL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The second stage of the project was the needs assessment phase. To assess strengths and needs in their assigned schools, the liaisons engaged in various data collection activities, analyzed this information and compiled the findings in a written report. The needs assessment instruments, developed in large part by the Documentation Unit and used by the liaisons in the fall, 1979, included the following: a building and grounds observational assessment; a teacher questionnaire; and separate interview forms for principals, assistant principals, classroom teachers,<sup>4</sup> special program teachers, auxiliary staff, paraprofessionals, and parents. The data collected with these instruments were used to assess the schools in terms of the five factors identified by Edmonds (1977) as characterizing greater school effectiveness: administrative and instructional leadership of the principal; instructional emphasis on basic skills; school climate conducive to pupil learning; ongoing assessment of pupil progress; and optimistic teacher expectations of pupil ability.

Participation by members of the school community in the data collection activities was voluntary and the confidentiality of interview and questionnaire responses was assured. Interview and questionnaire results, achievement test scores, pupil demographic data and informal observations were used by the liaisons to prepare a Needs Assessment Report for the school. This report was to provide the basis for the school's improvement plan to be developed by the School Improvement Committee.

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<sup>4</sup>Two forms of classroom teacher interviews were developed because the areas to be covered were too extensive to include in one form. Key questions were contained on both forms; other questions appeared on either one or the other form.



The following sections describe in greater detail the data collection phase of the process, the ways in which the reports were disseminated to members of the school community, and reactions to the report by various groups. Suggested modifications for some aspects of the needs assessment process are also presented.

### Data Collection

#### School Community Participation/Attitude

In general, school staffs, principals and parents were cooperative and open during the data collection phase of the project, according to liaisons and members of the school community. One project administrator reported that this process established credibility and trust in the schools. People in the schools felt free to communicate openly with the liaisons because they came from "outside" the school. The vast majority of planning committee members (94.9%) across all schools indicated that they had participated in the data collection phase, either by participating in an interview or by filling out a questionnaire. Eighty-six percent of other school community members across all schools indicated that they had participated.

A majority (n=8) of the 12 liaisons reported that staff were cooperative and frank during the interview and questionnaire process. Only three liaisons felt that staff were cautious or guarded during this phase, and one liaison felt that the staff had a better attitude toward the interview than toward the questionnaire. Similarly, nine of the 12 liaisons reported that principals were cooperative, open and honest during this phase; however, a few liaisons (n=3) did report that principals were resistant and guarded during the interviews. Nine of the liaisons

reported that parents were cooperative, eager and open when interviewed and only two liaisons stated that parents were guarded or not receptive. One liaison did not feel that he had seen enough parents to make a judgment regarding parental attitude during the data collection activities.

Seven of the 12 liaisons reported that there had been some problems during this phase. Two viewed staff reaction as a problem. Three reported scheduling and time constraints as problems. Problems associated with a self-administering "interview" form<sup>5</sup> were mentioned by the non-public school liaison. One liaison had a problem explaining questionnaire procedures to staff not at the faculty conference.

Principals had a somewhat different perception of staff attitudes during this phase. When asked if any difficulties had occurred during the data collection phase, seven of the ten principals reported that there had been problems, and six of these principals mentioned various staff reactions such as fear, discomfort, or opposition to the process. One principal said scheduling was a problem. Two principals reported that there had been no difficulties during this phase of the project.

In general, liaisons indicated that the data collection phase had proceeded relatively smoothly, and that various members of the school community had been cooperative during these activities. Principals felt more strongly that staff reaction during this phase was a problem. While other members of the planning committees and school community were not specifically asked about their attitudes during this stage, the

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<sup>5</sup>The same interview forms used in the public schools were used in the non-public schools; however, because one liaison was assigned to four non-public schools, there was insufficient time for personal interviews with staff and parents to take place. Instead, interview forms were distributed, self-administered, and collected. Personal interviews were conducted with principals.

majority did report that they had cooperated by either filling out a questionnaire or by being interviewed.

#### Suggestions for Modification of the Data Collection Process

Thirteen suggestions for modification of the data collection phase were made by ten of the liaisons. Four suggestions were made regarding the instruments: two liaisons felt that the two classroom teacher interview forms should be combined into one form to be administered to all classroom teachers; one liaison recommended that the strengths/weaknesses section of the interview forms be made into a checklist; and one liaison felt that the instruments should be more specific. One principal suggested doing away with the needs assessment process and allowing the principal to develop evaluation instruments for the school.

Four recommendations were made regarding the questionnaire procedure. Two liaisons recommended providing a better explanation of the Teacher Questionnaire and its confidentiality, and two recommended distributing and collecting the questionnaire at a faculty conference to insure a higher rate of return. Two suggestions that were made regarding scheduling of data collection activities were to spend more time in the schools prior to data collection in order to build up credibility, and to have a more compact data collection period. One project administrator also recommended that less time be spent on data gathering in the future. Other liaison recommendations were that school-based people collect the needs assessment data and that the questionnaires be analyzed by computer. Two liaisons had no suggestions regarding this phase.

### Dissemination of the Needs Assessment Reports<sup>6</sup>

It was SIP policy not to disseminate copies of the Needs Assessment Reports widely; rather, liaisons were to have copies available for committee members and other members of the school community at committee meetings and in the liaisons's office. The rationale behind this procedure was to maintain the confidentiality of the reports.

#### Dissemination to Planning Committees

Liaisons reported that the practice described above as SIP policy was generally followed. Nine out of ten liaisons indicated that Needs Assessment Reports were available to planning committee members both at committee meetings and in the liaison's office. Some liaisons elaborated on the method of dissemination: four liaisons indicated that they disseminated the reports, by section, at the meetings, and two indicated that people could make notes about the report. In one case, the non-public school principal prepared a summary of the report for distribution to staff.

When planning committee members were asked if they had read the report, 93.7% across all schools said "yes." In five of the eight schools, 100% of the respondents reported that they had read the report. In the other three schools, the range of "yes" responses was from 75% to 92.3%.

#### Dissemination to Non-Committee Members of the School Community

The method used by most liaisons (n=9) to disseminate the report to staff members not on the committee was to make copies of the report available in their office. In the school where a second (statistical)

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<sup>3</sup>Two schools did not reach the stage of disseminating reports and are thus not included in the first two parts of this section. In one of these schools, however, there were reactions to the dissemination procedures that were to be used; thus, only one school is not included in the discussion about reactions.



report was prepared, committee members received copies of the report to share with their constituencies. To encourage staff to read the report in another school, copies were given to grade leaders to share with teachers. Methods reported by liaisons to inform other staff members about the availability of the report included announcements over the public address system, and posted memos and appointment schedules.

According to the liaisons, there was a range in the number of non-committee staff who read the report. Two liaisons reported that no other staff had read it; three reported that several (one to five persons) had read the report; three reported that about ten had read it; and three reported that many other staff members (15 to 24) had read the report. When non-committee members of the school community were asked directly whether or not they had read the report, about half said "yes." Again, the figures varied widely by school; the range of "yes" responses in the eight schools was from 21.7% to 100%.

Most liaisons (n=8) reported that attempts were made to make the Needs Assessment Report, or results from the report, available to parents not on the committee. Four liaisons reported that the entire report was available for parents to read in the liaison's office, and one liaison stated that the report was available for parents to read at committee meetings. Other methods used to disseminate information from the report to parents not on the committee included Parent Association meetings with parents (n=4) and parent workshops (n=1).

Two liaisons indicated that the reports were not available to parents who were not members of the committee. In one case this was because the principal would not allow dissemination to other parents,

and in the second case (the non-public school) this was due to the fact that no parents were involved, even on the committee, at this point.

Liaisons consistently reported that there were some attempts to make the Needs Assessment Reports available, but few if any parents not on the committee read them. Nine liaisons indicated that no parents not on the committee had read the needs assessments, and three liaisons reported that small numbers (three to six) of non-committee parents had read the report.

#### Principals' Reactions to Dissemination Procedures

Liaisons reported that principals' reactions to the dissemination procedures varied. Half of the liaisons indicated that the principals had been comfortable with the dissemination procedure that had been established. Three of these six principals felt this way because they were very concerned about the confidentiality of the report.

Four principals were not satisfied with the procedure, according to the liaisons. Three principals wanted their staffs to receive copies of the report and one principal wanted the District Office to receive copies. The principal of the non-public school prepared a summary of the report for distribution. One liaison reported that the principal was non-committal and refused to get involved.

When principals were asked whether there were any problems with the way the report was made available, most of them (n=7) stated that problems had occurred. Two principals reported that they wanted greater distribution of the reports, and three principals reported that others (staff, etc.) had wanted wider distribution. These three principals did

report that the problems diminished following an explanation of the need for confidentiality and the compromise of making copies available in the liaison's office. One principal said the report was virtually unavailable; he had held it back from staff because it did not mesh with their perceptions of school needs. One principal claimed that there was not enough time for principals or staff to read the report. Three principals reported that there were no problems with the dissemination procedure.

#### Reactions of Other School Community Members to Dissemination Procedures

Most respondents to the School Questionnaire (63.4%) indicated that the Needs Assessment Report had been made adequately available to them. Although most members of one school felt that the report had not been made sufficiently available to them, people who responded to the questionnaire in the other seven schools generally felt that the report had been made adequately available as shown by the range of "yes" responses (51.9% to 100%).

Members of the planning committees were more satisfied with the availability of the report. Eighty-six percent of respondents to the Planning Committee Questionnaire said that the report had been made sufficiently available; in five of the eight schools, 100% of the respondents said this.

Liaisons agreed that staff and parents were generally satisfied with the Needs Assessment Report dissemination procedures, although there were some problems. Most liaisons (n=9) reported that staff agreed with the dissemination procedures; however, four of these liaisons stated that staffs would have preferred to take the report home, but

ultimately concurred with project policy in this matter. One school suspended committee meetings over this issue because, according to the liaison, staff believed that everyone should be allowed to have his or her own copy. The staff at another school were hesitant about reading the report because of the principal's anxiety. When asked how dissemination procedures should be modified, five liaisons suggested that copies of the report be disseminated more freely (to either committees, staff, District Office, or parents), and two liaisons suggested that individual schools should make the decision about whether or not to disseminate the report and in what form.

Parents generally had no complaints regarding report dissemination, according to most liaisons. In one school, problems arose when the principal would not allow some parents to read the report. One liaison indicated that the parents did not understand the issues raised about dissemination. In the non-public school there has been no parental involvement in the project thus far.

#### Summary

Results of the Needs Assessment Report were usually made available at School Improvement Committee meetings and in the liaisons' offices. To maintain confidentiality, copies were not freely distributed.

Planning committee members did state that, in general, the reports were made adequately available and that they had read the reports. Most other members of the school community agreed that the reports were made adequately available, but a much lower percentage of them stated that they had actually read the report.



Reactions to the dissemination procedure varied. Some staffs and principals wanted greater dissemination of the reports and the opportunity to take copies home; others were strongly opposed to their distribution. Some liaisons did suggest that copies be disseminated more freely in the future, and a few felt that the question of dissemination should be left up to the individual schools.

### The Needs Assessment Report

#### Principal Reactions

According to both liaisons and principals, most principals were basically satisfied with the results of the Needs Assessment Reports. Although two principals did not think that liaisons should make recommendations in the report, and two wanted more quantification of results, the majority of liaisons (n=9) reported general satisfaction on the part of principals. Three liaisons reported that principals were outraged and very dissatisfied with the results of the needs assessments. Two of those three principals were more satisfied with the needs assessment after slight modifications were made by the liaison, or, in one case, following the preparation of a statistical version of the needs assessment.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the principals (n=7) felt that the Needs Assessment Report was an accurate presentation of the strengths and needs of their schools, although three of the principals qualified their responses by indicating that the reports were accurate only in terms of liaison and/or teacher perceptions. Two principals said that the Needs Assessment Report was not accurate. One of them said that most responses to the Teacher

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<sup>7</sup>In one school there was great staff dissatisfaction with the "subjective" aspects of the narrative Needs Assessment Report. For this school, a second statistical Needs Assessment Report was prepared, based on the same data, but omitting all narrative sections.

Questionnaire were fairly evenly divided, so that one or two responses could sway the reporting of questionnaire results based on majority opinion. The other felt that it was inaccurate because, in his opinion, unsound conclusions had been reached. Similarly, when principals were asked if the results of the needs assessment were useful to them, eight said that the report was useful. Only one principal indicated that the results were not useful, and one principal indicated that the new statistical needs assessment would be more useful than the original narrative report.

#### School Community Reactions

Most liaisons (n=7) indicated that staff, for the most part, were satisfied with the results of the Needs Assessment Reports. These liaisons did report, however, that there were several minor suggestions or objections made to certain sections, e.g., one objection was that liaisons' recommendations should not be included. These staff feelings have generally remained the same over time, or, as in two cases, initial concern over the report has diminished.

Four liaisons reported different results. Staff members at one school were dissatisfied because they felt that the report was bland and overly optimistic. At another school, staff felt that the liaison had preconceived notions that were reflected in the report. The staff at this second school is now satisfied with a more statistical version of the report. At two other schools, staff never saw the report; the project was taken out of one school, and at the other school staff disagreed with dissemination procedures and caused an interruption in the process.

When staff members and other members of the school community were asked on the School Questionnaire whether or not the reports were accurate, about half (51%) did not answer the question, as they were instructed to do if they hadn't read the report. Of those who had read the report, most (81.3%) felt that it was accurate. The majority (81.3% to 100.0%) of respondents in every school but one indicated that the Needs Assessment Report was an accurate assessment of the school.

Two-thirds of the liaisons felt that parents were also satisfied with the needs assessment results, since they made only minor recommendations for change. Four of the liaisons indicated that there was no parental reaction because of little or no parental involvement in the project in their school.

#### Usefulness of the Report to the Planning Committees

The Needs Assessment Report was to be used by the planning committee as a basis for writing a School Improvement Plan. In general, it seemed to have been a useful document to the committees. One project administrator felt that the reports were indicative of committee concerns in some cases, and, in other cases, provided insights to the committees to help them begin the work of writing the plans. The other project administrator felt that the reports were comprehensive and covered many characteristics of the schools.

Nine liaisons reported that the results were useful to the School Improvement Committees as a frame of reference with which to start planning. One liaison reported that the narrative Needs Assessment Report was not seen as useful by the committee and was discarded. Three schools did not reach the stage of committee formation and plan development.

Nine principals reported that the needs assessment results were useful to the School Improvement Committees as part of the total picture and as a basis for the plans. One principal indicated that the results were not useful because a suggestion made by the liaison did not make sense.

Planning Committee Questionnaire responses regarding Needs Assessment Reports were generally positive. Eighty-four percent of the planning committee members reported that the Needs Assessment Report was an accurate assessment of the school. In five of the eight schools, 100% of the respondents stated that the Needs Assessment Report was accurate, and in only one school did most (72.7%) planning committee members feel that the Needs Assessment Report was not accurate. When asked if the report had been useful to the committee, member responses were again favorable. Eighty-seven percent of planning committee members (across all schools) indicated that the Needs Assessment Report had been useful.

In only one school did most respondents (58.3%) indicate that the report had not been useful. The same planning committee which reported that the needs assessment was not accurate also reported that it was not useful. This school received a second (statistical) version of the Needs Assessment Report following the staff's strong objection to the original narrative report. Since the liaison reported that school reaction was favorable to the statistical report, it is possible that the negative sentiment expressed in the questionnaire to the Needs Assessment Report referred to the more controversial narrative report.



### Additional Uses of the Needs Assessment Results

Eight liaisons stated that the Needs Assessment Reports were used for purposes other than developing School Improvement Plans. Needs assessment results were used in writing Title I Schoolwide Project proposals (n=5), Title II Basic Skills proposals (n=5), mini-grants (n=2) and an Arts in General Education proposal. One liaison reported that the results would be used when considering programs for next year.

### Suggestions for Modification

Most people involved in the project suggested that there be modifications in the Needs Assessment Report format. The report should be shorter, according to four liaisons, three principals, and one project administrator. The format of the report should be statistical, according to three liaisons and both project administrators. One liaison felt strongly that the report should be solely a narrative report.

Most liaisons (n=7) however, favored a narrative/statistical combination for the report. Three liaisons felt that the combination type of report would allow for liaison observations, which they felt should be included in the reports. However, one principal felt that no liaison observations should be included, and the two project administrators felt that there should be less of an emphasis on liaison observations. One liaison felt that a statistical report would cause the loss of too much information, and one felt that some interpretation by the liaison is necessary.

Other suggestions made regarding report format included (1) dealing with instructional emphasis only, instead of all factors, and (2) not identifying individual subgroups of teachers (e.g. reimbursable, cluster, etc.) in the report.

Principals made several suggestions regarding the time required for the needs assessment process. Three principals felt that more time is needed, one principal wanted more time to understand the statistical manner in which the report was done, one wanted more time to utilize the assessment for writing the plan, and one simply reported a need for more time during the process. One principal indicated that less time was needed for the process.

There seems to be a need for a shorter Needs Assessment Report containing a combination of narrative and statistical information. To what extent liaison observations should be included in the report is not clear from the suggestions made.

The length of time required for various phases of the needs assessment process was a problem, according to four principals. Exactly which phases need to be lengthened or shortened is not clear from the responses given.

#### Summary

Liaisons reported that, in general, principals, staffs, and parents were satisfied with the results of the Needs Assessment Reports. Most liaisons also indicated that the reports were useful to the planning committees.

Table 4 summarizes the responses of principals, planning committee members, and other members of the school community to questions regarding the accuracy and usefulness of the Needs Assessment Reports. They indicate that these groups thought the reports were, in general, accurate and useful.

Table 4

## Perceptions of Accuracy and Usefulness of Needs Assessment Reports

| School Groups       | % (n) Responding Positively |                   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
|                     | Report was Accurate         | Report was Useful |
| Principals          | 77.8 (7)                    | 80.0 (8)          |
| Planning Committees | 83.6 (61)                   | 87.0 (67)         |
| School Communities  | 81.3 (78)                   | NA                |

Suggestions regarding some aspects of the needs assessment process were made by a variety of project participants. Basically, the Needs Assessment Report should be a shorter report, and should contain a combination of both statistical and narrative information. The issue of whether or not to include liaison observations in the report was addressed by a number of respondents, but there does not seem to be consensus regarding recommendations on this issue.

#### School Needs Assessment: Summary

Participation in the data collection phase of the needs assessment process was generally good, according to liaisons, planning committee members, and other members of the school community. Liaisons reported that principals, staffs, and parents were basically cooperative during data collection, although some principals reported that staff reaction during this phase was a problem.

Once Needs Assessment Reports were prepared by the liaisons, they were available for members of the school community to read at committee meetings or in the liaison's office. This process was problematic because some principals and staffs wanted greater dissemination of the report. However, most committee and non-committee members responding to the questionnaires felt that the report had been made adequately available to them. The vast majority of committee members indicated that they had read the report, and about half of the non-committee members stated that they had read the report.

Principals, committee members and other members of the school community reported that the Needs Assessment Reports were accurate and useful. Self-reports of these groups agreed with liaison perceptions;



in general, there was satisfaction with needs assessment results. Recommendations for improving the needs assessment process included instrument revision, broader dissemination of the reports, and revision of the report format in order to shorten the report and to include both narrative and statistical information.

#### IV. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE FORMATION

##### Process of Committee Formation

After the Needs Assessment Reports were completed and shared with the schools, the process of School Improvement Committee formation was begun.<sup>8</sup> Project guidelines for the formation of committees were basically flexible. Committees were to be formed under the direction of the individual principals. Although project administrators encouraged an election process, a selection or volunteer process could have been used if it seemed more appropriate. The crucial consideration was fair representation of all school constituencies on the School Improvement Committee, i.e. representatives from reimbursable programs, special education, the administration, classroom teachers from all grade levels, auxiliary staff, and parents. Project guidelines mandated the inclusion of the principal, UFT Chapter Chairperson, and the assigned liaison on the committee. It was recommended that committees be comprised of between ten and twenty members, depending on the size of the school. Three schools chose to elect members, four used a selection procedure, and three selected volunteers.

In two of the three schools in which elections were held, volunteers came forward. In the third school, there was an election by constituents, with all positions advertised in the school building.

Selections for committees in three schools were made from a pool of volunteers: the principal selected committee members from the pool of

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<sup>8</sup>One school did not reach this stage in the project. Therefore, discussion of survey results in this section will apply to ten schools (nine public and one non-public).

volunteers in one, in another the principal and liaison jointly selected the committee members, and in the third the principal, liaison, and UFT Chairperson made the selections. In a fourth school, staff submitted in writing why they wanted to be on the committee and what they could offer the committee. The principal then selected members.

Three of the ten schools reported that committees were comprised of volunteers. Staff response was so poor in one school that the principal, liaison, and UFT Chairperson sought volunteers to fill the slots on the committee. In another school, both the liaison and the principal wanted an election; however, the staff opted for committee volunteers selected at a faculty conference. In the non-public school, the procedure was described as voluntary. The principal requested that the entire staff participate, and the committee became a "committee of the whole" (eleven teachers, one librarian, and one school secretary).

#### Support of School Community for the Committee Formation Process

Seven of ten liaisons reported that staff was supportive of the methods used to form the committee in their school, while three liaisons reported that the staff was not supportive. In two of the three schools where the liaison reported the staff unsupportive, a selection process had been used to form the committee. In one of these schools the liaison reported some discontent when the staff learned that the committee members would receive a monetary stipend for their participation. In the third school, an objection was raised to the principal's active recruitment of volunteers for the committee.

All liaisons felt that parents and principals were supportive of the methods used to form the School Improvement Committee. Liaisons

reported no complaints, no objections, and no dissatisfaction from parents. All nine of the principals interviewed responded that they were satisfied with the results of the committee formation process.

The majority of respondents (88.2%) to the Planning Committee Questionnaire (results of all schools combined) reported that they felt the procedure used to form the committee was fair; their responses indicating this ranged from 37.5% to 100%. In seven of the eight schools, between 80% and 100% felt this way.

In one school where only 37.5% of Planning Committee members felt the formation procedure was fair, there appeared to be some concern over the representativeness of the members. Committee members were selected in this school, and the liaison reported that staff appeared to be unsupportive of this process.

A majority of respondents (87.3%) to the School Questionnaire (results of all schools combined) felt that the procedure used to form the School Improvement Committee was fair, with individual schools ranging from 66.7% to 100% of respondents feeling this way. Seven of the eight schools had a range of "yes" responses from 84% to 100%. The school where 66.7% of respondents on the School Questionnaire had a "yes" response was the school that also had the 37.5% "yes" response to this item on the Planning Committee Questionnaire.

Based on the liaison's perceptions of principal, staff, and parent reaction to committee formation, and the self-reports of each of these groups, the consensus of opinion was that the procedures employed to form the committees were fair and were supported. Table 5 presents a summary of principal, planning committee, and school community responses



Table 5

Percentage and Number of Respondents Reporting Staff Support For  
Committee Formation Methods

| Respondents         | Percentage (n) |                 |             |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
|                     | Supported      | Did Not Support | No Response |
| Principals          | 100.0 (9)      | 0.0 (0)         | 0.0 (0)     |
| Planning Committees | 88.2 (67)      | 11.8 (9)        | 3.8 (3)     |
| School Communities  | 87.3 (145)     | 12.7 (21)       | 15.3 (30)   |

regarding staff support for the method used to form the committee in the individual schools.

#### Representativeness of Committee

Project administrators recommended that the School Improvement Committees be comprised of between ten and twenty members. Active School Improvement Committees operated in eight participating schools. Liaisons reported five committees in the 11-15 member range, while the remaining three committees had memberships in the 16-20 range. The average committee size was 15 individuals.

School constituencies represented on the School Improvement Committees included school administrators, the UFT Chapter Chairperson, classroom teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, auxiliary staff (school aides, secretaries, lunchroom, custodial, and security staff), special program staff (reimbursable and cluster), special education teachers, and the liaison assigned to the participating school (see Table 6).

Eight schools had active planning committees. Three of these schools had representatives of all constituencies on the committees. One school's committee was not represented by auxiliary staff, another school's committee was not represented by special education or special program staff, a third committee did not have a special program or a parent representative (two parents dropped out of the committee), and the final two committees were not represented by special program staff.

Nine out of ten liaisons reported that the committee was representative of the various constituencies. One of the liaisons felt that the committee was not representative because more parents were needed as well as more experienced, more influential teachers.

Table 6  
School Constituencies Represented on the Planning Committees  
(Reported by Individual School)

| School | Percentage (n) |          |                    |          |          |          |                 |               |          | Total      |
|--------|----------------|----------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|---------------|----------|------------|
|        | Admin.         | UFT Rep. | Classroom Teachers | Parents  | Paras    | Auxil.   | Special Program | Special Educ. | Liaisons |            |
| 1      | 15.4 (2)       | 7.7 (1)  | 15.4 (2)           | 15.4 (2) | 7.7 (1)  | 15.4 (2) | 7.7 (1)         | 7.7 (1)       | 7.7 (1)  | 100.0 (13) |
| 2      | 7.7 (1)        | 7.7 (1)  | 38.5 (5)           | 15.4 (2) | 7.7 (1)  | 7.7 (1)  | 0.0 (0)         | 7.7 (1)       | 7.7 (1)  | 100.0 (13) |
| 3      | 10.5 (2)       | 5.3 (1)  | 42.1 (8)           | 10.5 (2) | 10.5 (2) | 0.0 (0)  | 15.8 (3)        | NA            | 5.3 (1)  | 100.0 (19) |
| 4      | 15.8 (3)       | 5.3 (1)  | 31.6 (6)           | 10.5 (2) | 5.3 (1)  | 5.3 (1)  | 10.5 (2)        | 5.3 (1)       | 10.5 (2) | 100.0 (19) |
| 5      | 6.7 (1)        | 6.7 (1)  | 40.0 (6)           | 13.3 (2) | 6.7 (1)  | 6.7 (1)  | 0.0 (0)         | 13.3 (2)      | 6.7 (1)  | 100.0 (15) |
| 6      | 6.3 (1)        | 6.3 (1)  | 43.8 (7)           | 12.5 (2) | 6.3 (1)  | 18.8 (3) | 0.0 (0)         | 0.0 (0)       | 6.3 (1)  | 100.0 (16) |
| 7      | 7.7 (1)        | 7.7 (1)  | 30.8 (4)           | 0.0 (0)  | 7.7 (1)  | 23.1 (3) | 0.0 (0)         | 15.4 (2)      | 7.7 (1)  | 100.0 (13) |
| 8      | 15.4 (2)       | 7.7 (1)  | 15.4 (2)           | 7.7 (1)  | 7.7 (1)  | 7.7 (1)  | 15.4 (2)        | 15.4 (2)      | 7.7 (1)  | 100.0 (13) |

Eight of the nine principals felt the committee was representative of the various school constituencies. One of the nine felt that it was not representative because the custodial staff chose not to participate and because there were no students on the committee.

Results of the Planning Team Questionnaire indicated that 96.1% of respondents (all schools combined) felt the committee was representative. In six of the eight, 100% of the planning committee members responded that the committees were representative. Results of the School Questionnaire indicated that 89.3% of respondents (all schools combined) felt the committee was representative.

Based on the liaison's perceptions of principal, staff, and parent reaction to the representativeness of the committees, and the self-reports of each of these groups, the consensus of opinion was that the committees were representative of the various constituencies which make up the schools. Table 7 presents a summary of principal, planning committee, and school community responses regarding the representativeness of the committees in the individual schools.

#### Recommendations Regarding Committee Formation

Twelve recommendations regarding future formation of School Improvement Committees were made by seven liaisons. Three recommended that committee members be elected: two liaisons had been assigned to schools where a selection procedure was used, and one liaison was from a school that used volunteers to staff the committee. Two of these liaisons further recommended that the duties of the committee members be initially communicated to the staff so that staff understand what is involved. Another recommended that a closed ballot of volunteers be conducted.



Table 7  
 Percentage and Number of Respondents Reporting that Committees  
 Were or Were Not Representative

| Respondents         | Percentage (n) |                    |             |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|
|                     | Representative | Not Representative | No Response |
| Principals          | 88.9 (8)       | 11.1 (1)           | 0.0 (0)     |
| Planning Committees | 96.1 (73)      | 3.9 (3)            | 3.8 (3)     |
| School Communities  | 89.3 (159)     | 10.7 (19)          | 9.2 (18)    |

Two recommendations were made to use a selection process to form the committees: one liaison had been assigned to a school that had used an election process, and the other to a school that used a selection procedure. One suggestion was that selections be made from a pool of volunteers. The other recommendation was that the selection process must be used in order to avoid constant chaos and fighting within the school community. Two recommendations were that the committee be representative of all the various constituencies making up the school community.

Five other recommendations included the following: the committee should be of manageable size; the benefits and dangers of using an election process should be considered since elections can result in a biased committee; two liaisons should be assigned to each school in order to afford the school an opportunity to have a larger School Improvement Committee and good-sized sub-committees; more parents should be on the committee; and the committee members should be committed to the process rather than paid for serving on the School Improvement Committee.

One liaison assigned to a school that used an election process liked the committee formation procedure as it had been handled; one, assigned to a school that used selection, felt the process worked out well; another liaison, assigned to a school that used volunteers to staff the committee, made no recommendation. Two liaisons had been assigned to schools that did not reach the committee formation phase of the project.

#### Summary

The methods used for formation of School Improvement Committees varied in participating schools: three schools used an election process;

three a selection process; and three a volunteer method.

All of the principals, most of the respondents to the Planning Committee Questionnaire, and most respondents to the School Questionnaire reported that the procedure used to form the committee in their individual school was fair and that they were supportive of the method used. Liaison perceptions of principal, staff, and parent reaction to committee formation were in agreement with the self-reports of each of these groups.

Average School Improvement Committee size was fifteen individuals. Planning committees were active in eight of the nine participating schools. Most principals, respondents to the Planning Committee Questionnaire, and respondents to the School Questionnaire felt that the committee in their individual school was representative of the various constituencies which make up the school. Again, liaison perceptions were in agreement with the self-reports of each of these groups.

Twelve recommendations regarding the future formation of School Improvement Committees were made by seven of the liaisons. There appeared to be no uniform agreement as to whether election or selection was the more effective method of committee formation. Three recommendations were made specifying that committee members be elected, and two recommendations were made specifying that a selection process be utilized to form the committees. Two liaisons suggested that the committee be representative of all the various constituencies making up the school community.

## V. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND PLAN DEVELOPMENT<sup>9</sup>

### Length and Frequency of Meetings

Once the School Improvement Committees were formed in the individual schools, committee meetings began. All nine liaisons assigned to the eight schools that had reached this stage of the process reported weekly meetings of one and one half to two hours in duration. Seven schools held two-hour committee meetings once a week, and one-hour subcommittee meetings once or twice a week.

### Process Used to Develop the Improvement Plan

Guidelines for developing the improvement plan were available from the project office. The written plan was to be completed by the middle of June, 1980 for presentation to the Title IV-C Advisory Committee. The plan was to include at least one identified need in each of Edmonds' five factor areas; needs were identified based on Needs Assessment Report results, consensus of committee members, or consensus of the school community. The plan was also to include a proposed solution with detailed descriptions of activities, required resources, and an evaluation design.

Project administrators asked committees to avoid focusing on resource areas that require significant monetary expenditure, because the project's goal is not to provide resources such as books and supplies to participating schools, but to offer technical assistance that will enable the schools to utilize existing resources more effectively. The project administrators reported that these guidelines were followed by the planning committees in the participating schools.

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<sup>9</sup>It should be noted that this section deals with results reported by nine liaisons serving in the eight schools that reached this stage of the process. The principal of the non-public school answered these questions, while the liaison assigned to the school did not. Responses from nine liaisons and nine principals are included in this section.



The committees were encouraged to reach a consensus of opinion on the improvement plan and to prepare a completed plan for final review by the District Superintendent. However, since the improvement plan is considered a developmental, working plan, it is subject to continued refinement as deemed necessary over the course of next year.

Seven of the liaisons reported that the process used to develop the improvement plan involved whole committee input, followed by subcommittee development. Initially, the Needs Assessment Report was read and discussed by the entire School Improvement Committee, usually section by section. The committee then prioritized the needs that emerged. Subcommittees were created for each of the five factor areas. They were responsible for further development and preparation of the proposed solutions in their factor area.

One liaison reported that the committee as a whole developed the improvement plan. The entire committee read the Needs Assessment Report and prioritized the needs. Because of limited time, the committee decided not to organize subcommittees.

When asked if data collection other than the needs assessment was necessary to determine school needs, four liaisons reported that the School Improvement Committee, or a subcommittee, conducted further information gathering. In one of these cases, the committee asked staff and parents to rank forty areas of need that the committee had compiled, and in another instance the subcommittee polled the staff in order to assist the subcommittees with their decisions. In one school, subcommittees polled their constituencies regarding such matters as use of the accrual money that the school was to receive from the project. At a

fourth school, a group consisting of a committee member, the liaison, and the principal identified major needs and possible solutions and then compiled these in a worksheet which they distributed to staff for priority ranking.

All nine liaisons assigned to the eight schools that had reached this stage of development reported that consensus was the procedure used by the committee to agree on the content of the plan. In two schools, liaisons said the subcommittees had agreed on the ranking of needs, and then had submitted a rough draft of the plan to the entire committee for review and comments. In six schools, liaisons said there had been consensus on the content of the final plan. One of these liaisons said consensus had been reached after long and tedious discussions in the committee. Another mentioned that although consensus was used most often, voting was also used. Another liaison reported that consensus was the procedure used to agree on the content of the plan, but claimed that the building principal had strong input regarding what would or would not be approved as a "final" plan.

The majority of all respondents (66.7%) to the Planning Committee Questionnaire reported that improvement plans had been prepared at their schools. Respondents from three of the eight schools reported unanimously that a plan had been prepared. The other five school committees were at varying stages of progress at the time of questionnaire distribution.

#### Number of Sessions Necessary to Complete the Improvement Plan

At the time of interviews (May, 1980), liaisons reported that plans had been completed in two of the eight schools. In one school, completion of the plans took ten sessions (twenty hours), while in the other the

plans were completed in nine sessions (eighteen hours). Liaisons in five of the remaining schools reported that plans were incomplete, but were able to estimate that from 12 to 17 two-hour sessions would be necessary to complete the plans. One liaison could not estimate the time needed. These estimates indicate that the limit of twelve committee sessions, as specified in the project guidelines, is an insufficient number of sessions for a committee to read the Needs Assessment Report, prioritize needs, and develop the School Improvement Plan.

#### Accuracy of Plans/Input into Improvement Plans

The majority (91.5%) of those who responded to the Planning Committee Questionnaire felt that the improvement plans represented accurate presentations of the concerns of the committee as a whole. Three of the eight schools agreed unanimously on this point. Ninety-six percent of respondents felt that they had had adequate input into the improvement plan.

#### Roles of Members on the School Improvement Committee

##### Principal

The project administrators offered varying perspectives on the role of the principal on the School Improvement Committee. One administrator described possible roles for the principal: the principal can control the process totally; he can be open and democratic; the principal can chair the committee, appoint committee members, and limit the plan design; or he can be less involved. The other project administrator delineated definite guidelines for the principal on the committee: the principal should assume a background role by watching and interjecting in a judicious manner; the principal should let the liaison run the

meeting. It was also mentioned by this project administrator that the principal should be totally supportive of the project and be willing to accept criticism and change in the interest of school improvement.

Four of the liaisons reported that the principal chose to either chair or co-chair the School Improvement Committee meetings. The three principals who chaired their committees assumed dominant roles in committee activities and decisions, opened and closed the committee meetings, set the tone of the meetings, and participated in the process in an open and cooperative manner. These three principals also participated on subcommittees.

The final liaison reported that the principal co-chaired the committee meetings through mutual consent with the liaison. This liaison stated that although the principal never enforced veto power, he definitely asserted his position as principal in subtle ways.

Two other liaisons reported that the principal attended meetings but did not chair them. One liaison said that the principal had rotated from subcommittee to subcommittee, and the other liaison reported that the principal acted as a catalyst. Both liaisons agreed that the principal acted in a democratic, flexible manner as a member of the School Improvement Committee.

Three liaisons reported that the principal did not attend all the meetings. One principal attended three of the meetings; one was absent for one-half of the meetings, and even when in attendance, rarely participated; and the third principal attended two-thirds of the meetings.

In the principal interviews, six principals stated that they chaired or co-chaired the committee meetings. Three principals reported their



role on the committee as leader, or chairperson. One of these principals said that he had led the committee through the process to achieve its goals, while allowing all members an opportunity to air views. Another directed meetings and offered clarifications and suggestions where needed, while allowing suggestions and ideas to emanate from staff. The third principal stated that although he chaired the committee, he tried not to interfere in committee decisions. Three of the principals said they acted as co-chairpersons with the liaisons.

Three principals reported that they attended committee meetings, but did not chair. One principal acted as a resource to the committee, but allowed ideas to come from the committee itself. Another acted as a participating member with no leadership position, and the other principal acted in an advisory capacity, but admitted having the final say on what was included in the plans.

In summary, according to principals and liaisons, about half of the principals did play a leadership role, either as chair or co-chair, on the School Improvement Committees. Several principals attended committee meetings in various capacities, but did not chair the meetings. A few liaisons reported that the principals had not attended all of the committee meetings. The range and scope of the principals' functions appears to fit in with the flexibility regarding roles stressed by one of the project administrators.

#### Liaison

The project administrators stated that the role of the school liaison is that of field staff responsible for the change process at the school level. The liaison's role is to implement the process, i.e. to conduct the needs assessment, work closely with the principal in forming

and supporting the development of the committee, assist in the preparation of the plan, and facilitate the implementation of activities outlined in the plan. The liaison is the key to the success of the change process.

Six liaisons viewed their role on the School Improvement Committee as chairing or co-chairing the committee. Four of these liaisons reported chairing the committee. One reported opening and closing the meetings and rotating among subcommittees. Another liaison reported directing, generating ideas, and keeping the committee on a time line. One reported being in charge of the whole committee and supervising the subcommittees, and the fourth reported keeping the committee on target and assuming a leadership role, while handling committee members' suggestions democratically. One liaison who initially chaired the committee, eventually played a less dominant role so that the principal could assume the role of committee leader. The sixth liaison co-chaired the committee; this liaison reported being the "helmsman" of the committee while respecting the ideas and suggestions of the other committee members.

Three liaisons viewed their role on the committee as facilitating rather than leading. One of these liaisons reported answering questions of other committee members as his major function on the committee; this liaison tried not to dominate the committee and maintained a low-key position. Another liaison reported acting as both a referee and facilitator during the meeting process. The third liaison mentioned facilitating, motivating, and keeping up committee pace during meetings.

The seven principals whose schools had reached this stage of the process reported that liaisons either chaired or co-chaired the committee. Three principals claimed the liaison chaired the committee. One of these principals reported that the liaison led the committee and helped guide the subcommittees. Another principal claimed that the liaison was the primary force on the committee, formulating the agenda, conducting meetings, and insuring that minutes were taken and approved by the principal. The third principal claimed that the liaison chaired all but the last meeting.

Four principals reported that the liaison co-chaired the committee with the principal. One of these principals stated that, as co-chair-person, the liaison's activities included summarizing and alternately taking minutes. Another principal said the liaison had chaired sections of meetings, helped meetings run smoothly, generated ideas, and shared project resources. The third principal reported that the liaison had helped to secure resources and acted as a link with central project offices. The fourth liaison had guided discussions and was supportive of staff input.

The remaining two principals reported that the liaisons had played facilitative roles rather than leadership roles. One principal said that the liaison had presented the format of the project to the committee, showed the committee how to do the plan, and acted as a resource person. The other principal stated that the liaison facilitated communication by clarifying the goals and purposes of the School Improvement Project. Other liaison activities mentioned by this principal included compiling the needs assessment, coordinating and assisting subcommittees, providing

support to the principal, and making suggestions to improve school-wide and committee-wide communications.

In summary, in eight of the nine participating schools, including the non-public school, liaisons and principals agree about the role and activities of the liaison on the committee. The majority of respondents (98.6%) to the Planning Committee Questionnaire felt that committee meetings had been run effectively. Respondents in seven of the eight schools reported unanimously (100%) that the meetings had been run effectively.

#### Staff

Eight of the nine liaisons reported that staff played an active role on the committees. Six of these liaisons described the role of staff in general terms. For example, staff had an equal opportunity to agree and disagree; the committee worked by consensus, with each member guaranteed one vote on committee decisions; the group worked effectively in a democratic fashion; the staff was very active during sessions and each meeting had to end in group consensus on certain issues. The remaining two liaisons described more specific staff activities: the staff wrote the improvement plans, chaired the subcommittees, polled teachers for their input, maintained the minutes, and made recommendations to the larger committee.

One of the liaisons reported that staff played an inactive role on the committee. Staff was described as very docile and non-committal during committee sessions.

All nine principals reported that staff played an active role on the committee. One principal described the staff role in general terms:



staff was fairly active and formed a very good working committee. The remaining eight principals described staff roles in specific terms. Three of the eight reported discussion and exchange of ideas as the staff's primary functions; three reported staff's main function as working in subcommittees and writing the improvement plan; and two principals said that staff had reported committee activities and decisions to their constituencies.

#### Parents

Seven of the nine liaisons reported that parents played an active role in committee activities and decisions. Five of these liaisons described the parents' role in general terms: one claimed that parents were treated and behaved like other committee members; one liaison reported that parents were initially silent, but eventually assumed a vocal, active role on the committee; and one liaison stated that parents actively participated in all of the subcommittees. Two of the liaisons described the parents' role in specific terms: one liaison mentioned that parents were involved in the writing of the improvement plan, and the other reported that parents raised pertinent issues of concern to parents.

Two of the liaisons reported that parents did not play an active role in committee activities and decisions. One of these liaisons mentioned that the parents rarely showed up for committee meetings, while the other liaison claimed that the parents played no role at all.

Six of the nine principals reported that parents played an active role on the committee. Two of these principals described the parents' role in general terms: one mentioned that parents were active, and the

other reported that several parents showed up for meetings. Four principals described the parents' role in specific terms: one mentioned that parents voiced opinions and support of the School Improvement Project at Parent Association meetings and were active on subcommittees; another reported that parents, as members of the committee, discussed, analyzed, proposed, reacted to, and evaluated ideas and suggestions; another principal stated that the parents were involved in writing the improvement plan; and the other principal mentioned that parents represented a constituency and informed their constituency about committee meetings.

Two of the nine principals reported that parents did not play an active role on the committee. One reported that parents were not trained and did not appear interested in committee discussions, while the other principal stated that parents did not attend many of the committee meetings. The non-public school principal reported that parents were not members of the committee yet, but were informed of the project and developments at home/school meetings.

The majority of respondents (93.4%) to the Planning Committee Questionnaire felt that they and all members of the committees had been adequately involved in the activities and decisions of the committees. Their positive responses ranged from 78.6% to 100%.

#### Evaluation of Committee Functioning

The project administrators described the planning committee as the instrument of change, or the "heart of the process." Ideally, the committee would mature and function autonomously, enabling the school liaison to initiate and support the process in additional schools. The committee's major responsibility is to develop the improvement plan in

conjunction with the principal and assume the responsibility for the implementation of activities outlined in the plan.

Five of the nine liaisons gave a generally positive evaluation of the manner in which the committee as a whole functioned throughout the planning process. Two of these liaisons felt that the committee functioned very well; one stated that productive discussions took place and the committee members took an interest in and felt ownership of the plan; another liaison felt that the committee was hardworking and responsive to its tasks; and one liaison felt the committee was cooperative, sincere, and earnest in its desire to direct the school.

Four of the liaisons offered a generally negative evaluation of committee functioning during the planning process. One liaison was very discouraged by the committee's apparent fear of taking a stand; another was disappointed by the lack of professionalism on the committee; another liaison was disturbed by the lack of overall parental involvement, and by the inability of the group to keep up with the agenda developed by the liaison; and one liaison felt that the committee needed much more time than seemed necessary to adapt to each step of the process.

All nine of the principals gave a positive evaluation to the functioning of the committee as a whole throughout the planning process. Six of the principals felt that the committees functioned very well. One reported that once the committee overcame initial problems with personalities, it became a good working unit. Another principal reported that the committee seemed sincere in its desire to render the school as efficient a job as possible; and the last principal felt the committee did an excellent job, especially with developing solutions and activities to meet realistically identified school needs.

The majority of respondents (96.2%) to the Planning Committee Questionnaire felt that the committee as a whole had been supportive of the planning process. The range of responses was from 70% to 100%, with seven of the eight schools showing 100% agreement that the committee had been supportive of the planning process.

While the liaisons appeared to be split in their evaluations of the manner in which the committee as a whole functioned throughout the planning process, results of the principal interviews and Planning Committee Questionnaires appeared to be almost unanimous in giving positive evaluations of committee performance during this stage of the process.

#### Summary

School Improvement Committees reportedly met weekly in up to two-hour sessions, and one-hour subcommittee meetings were held once or twice a week in many schools. Improvement plans had been completed in two schools by May; these had been developed in ten sessions, but liaisons in other schools expected to take up to 15 sessions to complete plans.

Most liaisons reported that the plans were initially designed by the entire committee, but were developed further by subcommittees. Consensus was the procedure used to develop plan content. Most committee members who reported that their schools had prepared a plan also reported that they had had adequate input into plan content and that the plans reflected committee members' concerns.

The role of the principal on the committee ranged from a leadership role to a participatory role, as perceived by both principals and



liaisons. This role varied in scope, particularly for principals who were unable to attend all meetings.

In most schools, liaisons and principals also agreed about the role played by liaisons on the committee, which was primarily a leadership role. A third of the liaisons did not play a leadership role, but acted to facilitate committee activities and decisions.

It was reported that staff participated actively on the committee in all but one of the eight schools. Parents were active in about five schools. Most respondents believed that committee members, other staff, and parents had had adequate input into committee decisions and activities.

Liaisons were split in their evaluation of the manner in which committees functioned throughout the planning process. However, principals and other respondents were almost unanimous in their positive evaluations of committee performance.

#### Communication of Committee's Activities

#### and Decisions to the School Community

#### Communication Procedures<sup>10</sup>

Liaisons were asked to describe the procedures used to communicate the activities and decisions of the planning committee to the entire school. Eight liaisons said that minutes of committee meetings were used as a means of communication, either through distribution or posting. One liaison noted that the posting was not effective.

Five liaisons said that committee members had reported information to their constituencies. Of these, one mentioned that this communication

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<sup>10</sup> Three liaisons reported that their schools had not reached this stage in the project, so they are not included in the discussion of communication procedures and effectiveness.

was oral, another reported that it was initially oral but that it later took the form of written reports, and one liaison stated that minutes were distributed by committee representatives to their constituencies. One liaison said the committee used questionnaires to gather constituency responses to committee issues. Another liaison stated that about 75% of the committee members in that school reported back to their constituencies.

Three liaisons mentioned other means of communicating committee activities and decisions. They all said that minutes had been distributed or posted. In addition, one liaison said that the committee had shared the School Improvement Plan with staff members whenever asked, one liaison had tried to set up meetings with staff as a communication device but was stopped by the principal, and one liaison said that time was set aside at faculty conferences to discuss committee activities.

Effectiveness of communication procedures. Seven liaisons stated that these communication procedures were effective. Three of these liaisons responded with an unqualified "Yes." Two liaisons emphasized how important it was for committee members to report back to their constituencies; one mentioned that although there were no concrete suggestions from staff at first, later there were; and one liaison stated that there was always feedback.

Three liaisons felt that communication procedures were not effective even though minutes had been distributed or posted. One liaison stated that the posting of minutes was ineffective since they were incomplete, "watered down," sparse, and useless. Another liaison said that the school staff had selected representatives for the committee, and then had become disinterested in the project. The third liaison stated that communication was not effective because committee members did not have

time to meet with constituencies other than parents and special education staff.

Planning committee members were asked in a questionnaire if the school had been adequately informed of the activities and decision of the committee. Eighty percent of those responding to the question said "Yes." In all but one school, the majority of those responding said "Yes," with the majority ranging from 55.6% to 100%. In only one school did a minority (20%) respond affirmatively to this item.

Members of the school community were also asked in a questionnaire if the school had been adequately informed of the activities and decisions of the planning committee. Across all schools, 72.6% of the respondents stated that they had been adequately informed. In each school, the majority of those responding to this question (59.3% to 100%) answered "Yes." The only obvious disagreement between planning committee response and school community response to this question occurred in the school where only 20% of the planning committee responded "Yes," while 72.2% of the school community stated that they had been adequately informed of committee activities and decisions.

Members of the school community were asked to indicate whether or not they felt they had adequate input into the activities and decisions of the planning committee. Overall, 61.5% replied affirmatively with "Yes" responses ranging from 45.8% to 81%. In five schools, from 55% to 81% responded affirmatively. In two schools, 50% of the respondents answered "Yes," and in one school, a minority (45.8%) of those responding answered "Yes."

In summary, most liaisons whose schools had reached this stage of the project felt that the communication of planning committee decisions and activities to the whole school was effective. In addition, 80% of planning committee members and 72.6% of the members of the school communities felt that this communication was adequate (see Table 8). In the majority of schools, members of the school community felt that they had had adequate input into the activities and decisions of the committee. The most common methods used to communicate committee activities to the school were distribution and sharing of the minutes of committee meetings, and committee members reporting back to their constituencies.

#### Input of Non-Committee Members into Plan Development<sup>11</sup>

##### Staff Input

Liaisons were asked if staff members who were not on the committee had been involved in the development of the School Improvement Plan and how this involvement had occurred. Eight liaisons responded that these people did have input. Opportunities for non-committee staff input into the plan described by the eight liaisons were suggestions or feedback to committee members (n=5), distribution of a staff survey (n=2), attendance at meetings (n=2), discussions with the liaison (n=2), and the sharing of minutes (n=1).

##### Parent Input

Liaisons were asked about the input of parents who were not on the planning committee. Six liaisons responded that non-committee parents did have input into the development of the plan and two responded that parents did not. Of the first six liaisons, four said that parents on the committee had expressed concerns of other parents, one liaison

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<sup>11</sup> Four liaisons reported that their schools had not reached the plan development phase of the project and thus are not included in this discussion.



Table 8

Percentage and Number of Respondents Reporting on Adequacy of  
Communications About Committee Activities

| Respondents         | Percentage (n) |              |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
|                     | Adequate       | Not Adequate |
| Liaisons            | 70.0 (7)       | 30.0 (3)     |
| Planning Committees | 80.0 (60)      | 20.0 (15)    |
| School Communities  | 72.6 (130)     | 27.4 (49)    |

mentioned a parent survey, and one said that there was occasional parental input through the liaison.

Planning committee members were asked if they felt that the school as a whole had had adequate input into the improvement plan. In the five schools which had completed a school plan at the time of questionnaire distribution, 71.1% of those responding to this item answered "Yes." In four of the five schools, the majority of those responding answered affirmatively, with a range from 60% to 100%. In one school, only 30% of those responding felt that the school had adequate input into the school plan.

### Plan Review

#### School Community

Liaisons were asked to describe the process by which the School Improvement Plan was reviewed by the school community. However, when liaisons were interviewed (late May, 1980), no school had reached this stage of the process. By mid-June, when the Planning Committee and School Questionnaires were distributed, five schools did have an improvement plan ready for review. Therefore, the discussion of plan review will be based on the questionnaire results of these five schools.

Planning committee members were asked if the School Improvement Plan had been shared with the school as a whole. Seventy-six percent of committee members from all schools combined who answered this item responded "Yes." In three of the five schools, a majority of those responding answered affirmatively, with that majority ranging from 85% to 100%. In two schools, only 40% and 33% of those responding reported that the plan had been shared with the school.

Members of the school community were also asked if the improvement plan had been shared with them. Overall, 82.6% of those responding answered in the affirmative. In all five schools, the majority of those responding answered "Yes," with a range of 60% to 96%.

In three schools, both the planning committee and school community indicated that the improvement plan was shared with the school as a whole. In two schools, a majority of the school community felt that the plan was shared, although the planning committees did not concur.

#### District Superintendent and Local School Board

Liaisons were asked if the School Improvement Plan had been submitted to the District Superintendent or the local School Board for review. At the time of interview, only one school had actually done so; an overview of the plan had been discussed with the Superintendent and a presentation had been made to the local School Board.

#### School Support for Improvement Plans

Liaisons were asked if the school as a whole was supportive of the improvement plan. Five responded "Yes." One liaison further explained that this was because the plan was designed by staff. Another replied that staff wanted change and realized that it could happen with the assistance of the liaison.

One liaison responded that the school was not supportive of the plan. This liaison stated that although a few people were supportive of the process and the plan, neither the staff as a whole nor the principal was supportive.

Two liaisons stated that they did not know at that time if their schools were on the whole supportive, and one liaison responded that the

school was indifferent. Four liaisons responded that their schools had not reached that stage of the project.

Principals were also asked if the schools as a whole were supportive of the improvement plan. Five principals responded "Yes." One specifically stated that everyone supported improvement of the learning process, another responded that everyone in the school was enthusiastic, and a third replied that there was a small group of staff still not convinced due to their lack of understanding about the development of the plan.

Two principals were not sure if the school as a whole was supportive of the plan. One of these stated that it might not be accepted because it would place some very specific demands on all segments of the school community. The other replied that the committee already was supportive, and that the staff probably would be supportive, but that he was not sure about parents.

#### Significant School Needs Addressed in the Plan

Liaisons were asked if in their opinion the improvement plan addressed significant needs of the school. Eight liaisons responded "Yes" and one responded "No." Among the first eight, one liaison stated that the plan addressed all needs outlined in the school's Needs Assessment Report. One liaison stated that some problems which were too difficult to handle were left out, and one noted that peripheral requests were also being made in the plan and that the plan did not address issues of administrative style. One liaison stated that if the planning committee does not exist next year, the improvement plan will be just a paper document. The liaison who responded that the improvement plan does not address significant needs stated that many committee members and administrators refuse to address real school needs and feel threatened.



Principals were also asked if the improvement plan addressed significant needs of the school. Three of the schools had not yet developed a plan, but the other seven principals said "Yes." Two of them responded with an unqualified "Yes." The other five had the following comments. One principal stated that the committee attempted to address significant needs and issues. One principal responded with a definite "Yes," but stated that he did not agree with the way in which the school's needs had been ranked. One principal stated that the plan pulled together numerous school factors into a useful package. One principal noted that the focus on math problems would be most useful, and stated that the plan identified particular problems such as reading difficulties which contribute to math problems. One principal replied that everyone had the opportunity to discuss their dissatisfactions and to have input into the improvement plan; this principal added that the plan included 23 items in the five factor areas.

Members of the school planning committees were asked if the improvement plan actually addressed the needs of their schools. In the five schools that had completed a plan, 91.4% of respondents answered affirmatively; the range of "Yes" responses was from 77.8% to 100%. (In three schools, the response was 100% "Yes.") Members of the school community in the same five schools were also asked this question, and 84.9% of those responding answered "Yes," and their responses ranged from 61.1% to 93.8% "Yes." In three schools, 45% of those who returned questionnaires did not respond to this item.

In summary, there is a consensus among liaisons, principals, planning committee members and members of the school community that the

School Improvement Plans do address significant needs of the schools (see Table 9).

Suggestions for Modification of the Plan Development Phase  
Improvement Plan Format

When asked for recommendations for the modification of the improvement plan format, five liaisons offered suggestions: two recommended retaining the column set aside in the plan format for listing resources needed by the school to accomplish plan activities; two suggested that the central project offices distribute more specific guidelines on writing the plans; and another recommended providing additional time for the subcommittees to meet together in order to avoid the overlapping and replication that occurred between the activities of subcommittees as they developed various segments of the plan.

Five liaisons had no recommendations to make regarding modification of the improvement plan format. One of these liaisons felt the format was perfect, and another viewed the format as being good and simple.

Committee Process

Eleven recommendations regarding modification of the committee process were offered by seven of the liaisons. Six suggestions were made regarding the number of committee meetings: three liaisons believe that twelve meetings were inadequate and that at least fifteen meetings were needed by the committee to arrive at a decent improvement plan; one liaison suggested having twelve sessions spread out over six months, with time for evaluation, communication, and small group work; one liaisons suggested that committees meet every two weeks for an entire year; and another felt that there should not be a uniform calendar

Table 9  
 Percentage and Number of Respondents Who Believe that the Improvement  
 Plan Addresses School Needs

| Respondents         | Percentage (n) |                  |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
|                     | Does Address   | Does Not Address |
| Liaisons            | 88.8 (8)       | 11.2 (1)         |
| Principals          | 100.0 (7)      | 0.0 (0)          |
| Planning Committees | 91.4 (41)      | 8.6 (4)          |
| School Communities  | 84.9 (93)      | 15.1 (18)        |

for the schools, and that the number of meetings should be based on the needs of the individual schools.

Five individual suggestions were as follows: 1) subcommittees should meet without the liaison, and 15 should be the maximum size of the committee; 2) more time should be provided during the school day for meetings; 3) the committee should meet earlier in the day, as members are usually tired by 3:00 p.m., or the school should provide for the release of committee members for one or two days a month to write the plans; 4) additional assistance should be provided to help with group process; and 5) liaisons should have informal meetings along with the more formal committee meetings. Two liaisons felt that the committee process was generally good and offered no suggestions for modification.

#### Plan Review Process

When asked for recommendations for modifications of the plan review process, five liaisons offered six suggestions. The Documentation Unit should review the plans and give feedback to the liaison to take back to his committee. There should be closer communication between central project offices and the individual schools. There should be a uniform process, from school to school, where staff meets for half a day to review and approve the improvement plans (central project should provide coverage for the half day). Liaisons should have greater contact with the District Offices and with the District Superintendents. Greater school consensus and greater communication within individual schools regarding content of the improvement plan is needed.

Seven of the liaisons either did not reach this stage of the process or did not have any recommendations for modification of the plan review process.

### Summary

A majority of liaisons, committee and school community members felt that communication of planning committee decisions through distribution or posting of meeting minutes and through reports to school constituencies was effective. Respondents also indicated that non-committee staff and parents had had adequate input into the development of the plans. In general, liaisons and other respondents also reported that the School Improvement Plan had been shared with the school community, although it had not been presented to the District Superintendent or local School Board.

Liaisons and principals concurred in their assessment that the schools were supportive of the improvement plans. The general consensus among all respondents was that the plans do address identified school needs. However, half of the liaisons suggested that the plan development process be modified. Suggestions included requiring a list of needed resources in the plans, having more specific guidelines for the plan, and allowing additional time for subcommittees to meet and coordinate tasks.

It was also suggested that the plan review process be modified to include a review by the Documentation Unit and by school staff to allow greater communication and consensus about the plan within schools and to provide more frequent contacts between liaisons and the District Superintendents' offices.



## VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### Crucial Elements to Plan Implementation<sup>12</sup>

Liaisons were asked to describe those factors that they believed would be crucial to the successful implementation of the improvement plans next year. Three liaisons did not answer this question because their schools had not finished their plans yet. Five liaisons indicated that various types of assistance from the project administration would be essential for plan implementation. Four of these liaisons believe that the presence of a liaison in the school is crucial. Of these four, three indicated that the liaison's role should be to monitor activities during plan implementation. Four of the five liaisons also mentioned various kinds of resources as being crucial, including materials, consultants, and parent and staff workshops.

Four liaisons indicated that school community support was crucial. One indicated that more teacher participation was necessary, one indicated that more staff input and communication was needed, one mentioned staff commitment as vital, and one liaison stated that a functioning paid committee was essential. Two liaisons indicated that administrative input or support was needed. One liaison felt that more parental involvement was necessary.

Other elements were also reported as being critical for plan implementation. Two liaisons reported that it was crucial that the project administrators provide clarity regarding the availability of resources and assistance. Two liaisons referred to characteristics of plans that would be necessary for successful plan implementation. One indicated

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<sup>12</sup>Since eight schools reached this stage of the process, only the nine liaisons assigned to these schools were asked questions regarding crucial elements to plan implementation.

the necessity of a revised, more realistic plan timetable (i.e., plan activities specified for September for this liaison's school may not be possible). The other indicated that the use of short-range goals in the plans was necessary to prove that SIP has value and that school problems are being addressed.

Many principals (n=6) also felt that school community involvement and support were crucial for the successful implementation of the plan. Four principals also agreed with liaisons that support from the project's central office is vital to plan implementation next year. One of these principals reported that more specific information and guidelines concerning services and resources available from the project are needed; one principal indicated that money to buy resources and materials is needed; one principal felt that money to pay committee members is necessary; and one stated that a meeting of all participating schools' School Improvement Committees, arranged by the project administration, would be important for the successful implementation of the plans next year.

Other principals mentioned the use of strategies to develop teacher effectiveness, cooperation of the Chancellor's office, and the principal's enforcement of the plan as crucial elements for successful plan implementation.

#### Likelihood of Successful Plan Implementation

Most people surveyed reported that their school plan had a good chance of being successfully implemented next year. When planning committee members were asked whether the plan could be successfully implemented, 95.6% of those who reported that their schools had completed plans, felt that the plans could be successfully implemented. In six of

the eight schools surveyed, 100% of the respondents answered affirmatively. Similarly, of those non-committee school community members who responded to this questionnaire item, most (79.1%) stated that the plan could be successfully implemented.

Six liaisons felt that successful implementation of the plan was very likely. Two of these liaisons qualified this statement, by claiming, in one case, that successful implementation depended on the principal's assertiveness and, in the other case, by stating that it depended on the cooperation of the central Board and the central project administrators.

Three liaisons felt that the likelihood of implementation depended on the availability of crucial elements described earlier. One liaison said these were the presence of the liaison to monitor progress next year and the availability of materials and workshops. Another said that a functioning, paid committee, clarity concerning availability of resources, and a revised plan timetable were crucial. The third cited the presence of the liaison next year and the availability of resources and consultants.

Only one liaison claimed that successful implementation would be very unlikely because he doubted that the staff's trust in the process and the project, and the principal's support of the project would be present. Three liaisons did not respond to the question because their schools had not reached the plan-writing stage of the process.

#### Role of the Liaison Next Year

Liaisons were asked to anticipate what their role in the schools will be next year. Three liaisons reported that they will not be present in the same schools next year. One of these schools is no

longer in the project, one school has been assigned a different liaison, and the school that had suspended committee meetings no longer had an assigned liaison at the time of these interviews. Nine liaisons indicated that their role will be to facilitate and advise during implementation of the plan next year. Two liaisons stated that they would be in the schools to monitor the process. Many liaisons (n=5) stated that they would be needed full-time or almost full-time in their school next year.

When the project administrators were asked to describe the role of the liaison next year, they indicated that liaisons will be acting as consultants and monitors in schools involved in plan implementation. In addition, however, liaisons will be assigned a second school where they will begin the school improvement process again by introducing the project, performing needs assessment activities, and supporting the formation and development of a planning committee. Liaisons will be splitting their time between their two assigned schools.

#### Summary

Most liaisons, planning committee members, and other members of the school community reported that they felt the improvement plans have a good chance of being successfully implemented next year. Some elements must be present, however, in order for successful implementation to occur. Two necessary elements, according to a number of principals and liaisons, are assistance from the central office of the project, and the support and involvement of the school community. During the implementation of plan activities next year, the liaison's role will be to facilitate the process, advise the committee, and monitor plan activities.

## VII. PROJECT TRAINING, SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION

### Project Training of Liaisons

#### First-Year Training

Initial project training for school liaisons consisted of a formal three-week schedule of workshops at central project offices in September, 1979. Training was offered in the areas of needs assessment, curriculum and instruction, and proposal development. The project administrators recognized that liaisons came to the project with "superb qualifications," and this awareness ensured to some extent that the training provided to liaisons was appropriate in level and degree. Based on the results of the training and the experiences of liaisons in the schools this year, the project administrators also recognized the need for some different areas of training in the future, such as workshops in teacher training techniques, administrative style, and school climate. After the initial training sessions in September, some further in-service training was provided to liaisons over the course of the year.

Liaisons were asked about the adequacy of the training they received for the role they performed. All twelve liaisons responded to this question. Seven liaisons responded that training was adequate. Of these, four cited aspects of the training that were particularly adequate: workshops in proposal writing and curriculum overview, and the training materials distributed; proposal development workshops; the needs assessment workshops; and instructional training. Three of these liaisons also said their prior training and experience were helpful.

One liaison described the training as inadequate because it did not relate to actual problems faced in the schools. One liaison did not



respond in terms of the adequacy of the training, but stated that his training came from long years of experience in the system.

The remaining three liaisons had mixed responses. Of these, two noted specifically that earlier training was good, but that it later "fizzled out." The third liaison responded that training was good in some areas, but that more could have been done in terms of sensitivity and human relations training and communication.

#### Additional Training

Liaisons were asked to recommend any additional training they would like to receive in the future to assist them in their role. Nineteen specific suggestions for additional training appear to fall into two categories--content and procedure. Of the nine content-related suggestions, seven fell into the general area of human relations, group processes, conflict management, and effective committee work. One suggestion was that workshops be included in plan development, and one was that regular sessions on new math and reading programs be added.

The other ten suggestions were procedural in nature, some with implications for early training, but more for ongoing training and development. Six of these specifically recommended using liaison expertise in ongoing training activities. Three recommended activities which would provide liaisons with wider experience and personal resources, such as visiting other project schools, attending professional conferences, and visiting the District Office. One liaison responded that consultants from outside the Board of Education should conduct training.

In summary, the liaisons' response to training was generally positive. Many suggestions for additional training in the area of human relations

were made by liaisons. Their procedural recommendations dealt mainly with suggestions for more ongoing training and development.

### Liaison Activities

Liaisons were asked to describe the three activities in which they were most involved at their schools, in addition to needs assessment and planning committee responsibilities. Twenty-seven specific activities were listed by eleven of the liaisons.

Seven liaisons mentioned that they had also been involved in instructional assistance to teachers (e.g., dissemination of resource materials, demonstration of teaching techniques, assistance in the development of the school's reading program, giving workshops, and teaching classes). Seven liaisons mentioned the preparation of funding proposals for the school. Three liaisons mentioned administrative duties: lunch and breakfast program supervision, assisting in morning line-up and lunchroom activities, assisting the person in charge when the principal was out of the building, and implementing the new pupil accounting system. Four liaisons mentioned providing advice and consultation to the principal.

Six other activities were mentioned, including assisting in organizing a Reading is Fundamental conference at the school, acting as a support and helping the school administrators to understand teachers, coordinating the bilingual and monolingual programs, acting as a resource person with connections at the central Board of Education, acting as an intermediary between the teachers and the school administration, and assisting with community relations.

Principals were also asked about liaison functions performed in addition to their needs assessment and planning committee activities. Twenty specific functions were listed by eight principals.

Six principals mentioned instructional assistance (e.g., setting up a resource room, covering classes, providing reading materials, and presenting reading workshops). Four principals cited the preparation of funding proposals for the school. Three principals mentioned liaison help in locating instructional resources and materials, and in cutting through red tape in school dealings with the central Board. Two mentioned the liaison serving in an advisory capacity to the principal.

Five principals mentioned other activities: two mentioned the role of the liaison as a sounding board for staff; one mentioned the liaison role of mediator between staff and administration; one mentioned reproducing materials for the school and attending School Board and PTA meetings; and one principal mentioned the liaison's attending special school functions such as the science fair, school plays, and a home/school meeting.

In summary, there were no major discrepancies between principal and liaison responses to this question. Generally, there was consensus as to the kinds of additional assistance the liaisons provided to the schools: instructional assistance, proposal development, administrative duties, support to the principal, and acting as an intermediary between the administration and others, i.e., staff, parents, and the central school administration.

## Project Support to Schools

### Kinds of Project Support

In interviews with the project administration, it was stated that services to participating schools in the first year of the project included proposal development and instructional workshops, as well as the services of project personnel in assisting schools with administrative difficulties involving the central Board. Each school also received various kinds of school supplies and instructional materials to meet specific school needs in the basic skills area. It should be noted that in the coming year, as schools begin to implement their improvement plan activities, the delivery of project services and resources will occur in a more regular and coordinated manner.

The twelve liaisons responded to a question about the nature of support services received by their schools from the project. Nine liaisons listed supplies, nine listed instructional materials, and four listed project assistance in dealing with central Board of Education.

Three liaisons responded that the project provided little or no support to their schools. However, each of these liaisons did mention some specific support in terms of supplies, instructional materials, or services. One of these was a non-public school which does not receive the same project services as participating public schools due to State Education Department program guidelines.

Principals were also asked about resources, services, and materials provided to their schools by the project. Two mentioned supplies and seven mentioned instructional materials. Three principals mentioned

the provision of special services. one specifically cited consultants, another mentioned that the project Resource Specialist explored funding sources and reviewed proposals for the school, and the third mentioned that the project secured Reading is Fundamental resources and materials.

#### Adequacy of Project Support and Services

Liaisons were asked about the adequacy of project support and services received by their schools. Four liaisons responded that support and services were adequate, and five liaisons said they were not adequate. One of the latter five liaisons was assigned to the participating non-public school. This liaison suggested that the non-public schools have not been eligible for many of the project's supportive resources and services and have become isolated from the project, and that a need exists to explore other resource avenues for these schools. There is an apparent discrepancy in the response of two liaisons who answered that their schools had received nothing, yet they had previously identified services and supplies provided to the school when asked about these. Two other liaisons, who also identified two and three types of support, stated that support was simply not adequate to meet school needs.

There were two mixed responses. One liaison responded "yes and no," and raised concerns about the inequitable distribution of resources to the schools. Another responded that there is always a need for more.

Principals were also asked about the adequacy of project support in terms of resources, services, and materials. One stated that it was inadequate because very little support was given and because ordered supplies had not yet been delivered. The non-public school principal stated that the question did not apply to his school.



Eight principals thought project support had been adequate, and four of these did not qualify their answers. Two principals qualified their answers with the following remarks. There is "not enough information available on where to apply for special funding," and though support and services were adequate, they were "not adequate enough to develop a complete change that can be seen at this particular time."

In summary, both liaisons and principals mentioned receiving a variety of project supports in the form of supplies, instructional materials, and special services. However, while all but one principal described this support as adequate, liaisons generally were dissatisfied.

#### Project Communication

##### Central Project Office and Liaison Communication

When interviewed, the project administrators reported a variety of means of communication between themselves and liaisons. Meetings were scheduled at project offices on the average of one every two weeks, or on an "as needed" basis. A telephone relay system between the liaisons was set up, but this proved generally ineffective. There was regular telephone contact between the project and the liaisons. Liaisons also kept daily logs of their activities in the schools. The logs were reviewed on a bi-weekly basis by the project administrators. The administrators emphasized the need for more contact between themselves and the liaisons. They stated that the quality of ongoing communication was largely influenced by periods of high and low program activity.

Liaisons were asked about the effectiveness of lines of communication between themselves and central project offices. Four liaisons described

these as effective, although two of them cited reasons for improved communication between themselves and the central offices: "I've been in the office a lot lately." and "I am more open and speak up." The third liaison stated that he had been in continual contact with the central offices because of a special project which was being prepared for piloting at the school and therefore felt very informed. The fourth liaison stated that communication with the project offices was adequate, but felt that communication with the central Board was inadequate.

Eight liaisons felt that communication was not effective. Six of these liaisons cited problems in the dissemination of project information to liaisons and the communication of program decisions and developments from the central project offices to liaisons. One liaison stated that the project itself should have more overall visibility, and one liaison stated simply that communication could be better.

In summary, liaisons felt that communication between themselves and the central project offices was not effective overall. The general response indicated that a more regular, ongoing, two-way communication was desired.

#### Central Project Office and Principal Communication

In interviews, the project administrators cited several means of communication between the central offices and principals, including monthly meetings in which principals from all participating schools met as a group with the project administrators, individual meetings with principals, telephone contact, and through liaisons.

Principals were asked if the monthly principal meetings had been of value to them. Five principals responded positively and three responded negatively. Two principals did not respond to this question: the non-public school principal, who had not been invited to attend these meetings, and the principal of the school that had suspended participation.

Of the five principals who felt that principal meetings had been of value, two mentioned the sharing of other schools' project experiences and problems as a positive feature of the meetings. One principal cited keeping abreast of the project as a positive feature, and noted the need for regular communication, but wished it could be done in a better way. Two principals noted that the more general features of the meetings were worthwhile. One stated, "There was nothing specific of value, but the general sense of communication is of value," and the second observed, "Some were (valuable), others dealt with specific needs.... Overall, central themes were worthwhile."

Three principals responded that principals' meetings were not of value. One principal complained that only three meetings were held and not everyone was there, and although there was an opportunity to share information at meetings, principals did not have input into the planning of meeting agendas. A second principal felt that there was too little opportunity for the discussion of professional development. The third principal complained that there was little learning about other schools and that issues did not surface at the meetings.

There were four suggestions for modification of principal meetings. One principal recommended that individual conferences should be used,

while another principal wanted some way to learn more about other schools in the program. One principal suggested that since being out of the building is difficult for principals, monthly meetings may not be necessary and a newsletter might be substituted. Another recommendation was that half of each monthly meeting be set aside for principals to meet among themselves.

In summary, while the majority of principals felt that the monthly meetings had been of value, a number of other principals were dissatisfied since they felt the meetings should have presented more of an opportunity for discussion with peers and professional development.

#### Summary

Liaison response to training was generally positive. Project administrators are aware of the need for additional training in the human relations area described by liaisons, and a number of procedural recommendations made by liaisons could be incorporated into future training.

There was a general consensus between principals and liaisons about the kinds of assistance that liaisons provide to schools in addition to their needs: assessment and planning committee activities. These included instructional assistance, proposal development, administrative duties, and support to the principal. They also served as a link to the administration for staff, parents, and the central school administration.

Both liaisons and principals mentioned receiving various kinds of project support, including supplies, instructional materials and special services. All but one principal described support as adequate, but only a few liaisons felt this support was adequate.



On the whole, liaisons felt that communication between themselves and central project offices was not effective. The general tone of response indicated that a more regular, ongoing, two-way communication was desired.

Though the majority of principals felt that monthly principal meetings had been of value, a number of other principals were dissatisfied since they felt the meetings should have provided more of an opportunity for professional development and discussion with peers.



## VIII. PROJECT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AND QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION

### Major Project Weaknesses in Need of Modification

#### Liaisons' Perspectives

When the liaisons were asked for suggestions pertaining to program areas they thought needed improvement, the most frequent response they made was about communication among the project constituencies or between the project staff and others. Eleven of the liaisons mentioned the need for improved internal project communication. Their suggestions included the following: that there be more ongoing and effective communication between the project administrators and the liaisons (n=5); that there be more interaction and sharing of experiences within the project, particularly among the liaisons (n=4); and that liaisons take an active part in project planning and decision-making (n=2).

Twelve liaisons expressed the desire for direct feedback from persons involved in the project who were not on the project staff. Two suggested that regular group meetings be held between the liaisons and project principals, and between the liaisons and the UFT Chapter Chairpersons of the schools involved in the project. One liaison suggested that a project representative be present at the regular meetings which the UFT holds with the Chapter Chairpersons of the project schools, and two liaisons felt that they should be able to attend meetings of the Title IV-C Advisory Committee.

Two liaisons also suggested that a line of communication be maintained between the liaisons and central administrators at the Board of Education. Another liaison expressed a desire for feedback from the project administrators regarding how others (unions, superintendents,

principals, parents, etc.) view the liaisons' role and performance. Two liaisons suggested that communication be improved with project participants through regular meetings and interactions.

Seven liaisons called for more supervisory support. Four of these expressed the need for increased school visits by the project administrators to observe and advise committee meetings and activities. Three other responses suggested that there be the following: periodic evaluation of liaison performance; more structured communication from the project leadership to liaisons, principals, and schools staffs; and central project office support to liaisons.

Four liaisons felt the need for more long-range planning of project activities; these liaisons felt that at present the project seemed to function on a day-to-day, or on a crisis-management basis. Related to this concern was a desire voiced by five liaisons for greater clarity or consistency in the project design, i.e., more consistency in project implementation by liaisons from school to school (n=2) and greater process clarity across all project phases (n=3).

The tapping of the individual talents of liaisons, such as skills in bilingual education or in special education, was recommended by three liaisons to meet the needs of project schools or in training project staff.

The use of a team approach was recommended by three liaisons. One of these liaisons felt that a team consisting of one experienced liaison and one new liaison would be a useful training approach; another suggested that a team approach would provide liaisons with mutual support if difficult school situations occurred.

Two liaisons voiced serious concerns regarding the quality of support for the goals and philosophy of the School Improvement Project provided by central administrators at the Board of Education. One of these liaisons felt "lip service" had been paid to project goals and philosophy, and that when challenged by the unions and other powerful groups, program goals had been modified to appease and compromise. The other liaisons stated that because of the project's emphasis on achieving change within the system, the central Board administrators should have anticipated great resistance to the program, and should have been prepared to meet the resistance of powerful special interest groups in an appropriate way. This liaison also felt that the central Board administrators undermined the project and destroyed a potential power base by actively soliciting the applications of participating principals for the chief project administrator's position. One liaison also commented that lack of support for the project made liaisons more vulnerable to professional attack, and that they should have a more formal means through which they can effectively defend themselves.

Among additional concerns about the needs and weaknesses of the project, the liaisons expressed the following:

- The project description circulated to schools must be revised because all school constituencies should know what they are becoming involved in.
- More "legwork" is required for acquiring and preparing resources to meet identified school needs.
- The project needs to experience the theoretical philosophy it is espousing.

- There is a need to get something accomplished after preparing for so long.
- There is a need for committee work/group dynamics training.
- Distance and travel time must be considered in assigning liaisons to schools.
- There is a need for equitable representation by sex and ethnicity among project administrators.
- There is a need for review of the liaisons' salaries.

The liaison assigned to the non-public schools in the project recommended that those principals be invited to project meetings with public school principals, and that the project timetables of the public and non-public schools be coordinated to increase the integration of these two program components. This liaison was concerned that there was no formal provision for committee meetings in the non-public schools. Non-public school committees cannot be paid by the project to meet, and many staff members have other commitments after school. The importance of determining what project resources and services would be legally available to the non-public schools was another concern because, the liaison stated, there is a need at present to demonstrate the project's good intentions and to encourage the development of school plans.

#### Project Administrators' Perspectives

The Project Director and the Project Manager were asked to specify which areas of the project they felt needed improvement and what changes, if any, they would like to see in the program. Project administrators mentioned the following items: establishment of more effective, overall communication; field supervision (the need to visit regularly and work



more closely with liaisons and planning committees); further development of the project resource pool and consultant services to meet the identified needs of schools next year; provision of additional meeting time for planning committees next year; initiation of ongoing project meetings between the UFT Chapter Chairpersons and liaisons to identify and avoid developing problems; and consolidation of the duties of the project's office staff.

In terms of the role of central Board administrators, the project administrators felt that a stronger effort must be made to define the roles of the various school constituencies in the project and to delineate the function of the Title IV-C Advisory Committee. It was also suggested that to further support school-based constituency planning in New York City public schools, the Teachers' Contract would have to provide for more planning time, building principals would have to be given control of their schools' budgets as well as control of personnel selection, and central Board service delivery would have to be designed to meet the need of individual school buildings.

In terms of planned program design revisions, the project administrators stated that various aspects of the school selection/program introduction and needs assessment phases of the project had already been modified and piloted. (These revised aspects of the project will be discussed further in a later section of this report).

#### Principals' Perspectives

Three principals suggested that the project was weak in terms of communication. One of these principals stated that communication about project activities might be improved, perhaps through a newsletter.



Another commented that principals' meetings were too infrequent, and that principals and liaisons should meet together as a group rather than attend separate meetings as they do now. In addition, this principal indicated that no sharing process had emerged among project principals. The third principal indicated that there must be a principals' network which is taken seriously and professionally run. At present, he felt, principals' meetings have only provided information which could have been adequately communicated through project memos.

Three principals made recommendations about the needs assessment phase of the project. It was pointed out that the needs assessment process was too lengthy, and that the report should have been made available to parents and staff at the principal's discretion.

Three principals also said that the practice of paying committee members should be changed. One of these principals felt that problems resulted from the inequities in payments to various constituencies for committee participation, i.e., supervisory personnel were not paid, staff members were paid per session (hourly wages), and the parents were reimbursed for child care expenses. This principal suggested that next year, either all committee members should receive the same reimbursement, or no one should be paid. Another principal mentioned that the committee might not continue next year if committee members were not paid, and the third principal felt that a true assessment of the project's strengths and weaknesses could be made if committee members did not receive pay.

The need for clarification of the project design was cited by two principals. The role of the liaison, they felt, was not well-defined or

explained clearly enough to the staff. They also felt that the initial project description was too wordy. Two principals said the project had not managed to arrange equipment and physical plant repairs, which they had hoped it could do by cutting through the red tape at the central Board.

Two principals were concerned that their liaisons would be spending less time in the school next year; the project plans are to assign each liaison to an additional school to begin the school improvement process. One of these principals said that the liaison will be needed in the already-participating school well into the coming year because it takes that long for a group to take on responsibility, and because the liaison is an agent of change and should not be moved before change has begun to occur. The second principal commented that he was unhappy about the anticipated loss of some of the liaison's time in the school next year and about the possibility of the liaison being changed; this principal felt that there is a need to maintain a continuity of the individuals who are involved in the project.

Among the other comments made by principals regarding project weaknesses were the following: the project has not generated enough resources from outside the central Board; the management of the project needs improvement; the majority of the project's problems were caused by poor planning or program implementation; the process is not replicable in all schools; and the project administrators should have school building experience.

#### Major Project Strengths

##### Liaisons' Perspectives

The most commonly cited project strength, according to eight liaisons

was the program's provision of direct services to schools. Five of these liaisons stated that the greatest strength of the project was providing a school with an additional staff member (i.e., the liaison) who has the expertise and time to facilitate the implementation of innovative activities. The provision of needed resources to the school was mentioned by the other three liaisons.

The second most frequently cited project strength was its philosophical goals and premises (n=7). Six specific strengths cited included the following: (1) there is a tremendous need for the process of change in schools as it is supported by the project; (2) the project re-emphasizes instruction, planning, and evaluation in the schools, which are issues often given secondary attention; (3) the project has a democratic basis which results in people working together on a comprehensive plan; (4) the project contains the "germ" for school-based comprehensive planning; (5) the project is a vehicle for change in the schools; and (6) the project can help improve schools because its goals and objectives are theoretically sound.

Six liaisons mentioned providing an assessment of the school as a major project strength. Particularly positive aspects of the school assessment cited by liaisons were the comprehensive nature of the needs assessment process and report (n=2), the objective picture of the school that the liaison as an outsider offers (n=2), and the usefulness of the needs assessment in providing an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of school activities (n=2).

The positive effect of the project on school communication and human relations was offered as a significant program feature by five liaisons. Comments made by liaisons include the following:

- The school has had a strong positive response to the project.
- Greater school pride has been generated because everyone is working hard.
- Relations have improved in the school.
- Lines of communication have been opened.
- Teachers feel that people on the outside care for them.
- Parents have begun to talk to others in the school.
- The project has facilitated communication between staff and administrators and among staff.

The fact that the project is school-based and therefore serves real school needs (n=2), and that it directly involves and gives a voice to school constituencies (n=3) were also project characteristics mentioned by liaisons as major program strengths.

Finally, several other program characteristics were described as strengths: the liaison "team" approach piloted in one school allowed the liaisons to handle more work, and provided them with mutual support; the full-time assignment of the liaison to one school long enough to effect positive change; the freedom of the liaisons to use their own skills to implement the process in their assigned schools; project support to the liaison during times of difficulty; the liaison training process; and the technical support provided by the Documentation Unit to the liaison during the needs assessment phase activities.

#### Project Administrators' Perspectives

Project administrators stressed that the major strength of the program was the fact that it provided direct service to schools. They described the project orientation as one which actively attempted to



offer real solutions and hope to schools rather than placing an over-emphasis on theorizing. One administrator also cited the project's conceptual foundation as a major strength.

The school-based experience of the staff was another project strength noted by administrators. The field staff included teacher trainers and reading and math experts who were of immediate help to the schools. The strengthening of communication and relations in the schools was mentioned as another major benefit of the program. Also cited by project administrators was the project's ability to coordinate the delivery of resources and the technical assistance capabilities of the central Board to meet individual school needs and training needs of project field staff.

#### Principals' Perspectives

The major project strength listed most often by principals was the provision of project resources. Three principals mentioned the assistance provided by the liaison, three mentioned the additional instructional materials and resources provided through the project, two indicated assistance from central office project staff, and two principals noted the project's ability to cut red tape in expediting central Board services to their schools.

Five principals stated that school constituency involvement in and ownership of the process of improving the school are major strengths of the project. The professional respect and reinforcement afforded teachers by the project was mentioned by two principals. One principal cited the project's facilitation of shared, clear school goals. Three other project strengths listed by principals were an honest needs assessment, minimum paperwork required by project involvement, and the hope for a basic skills improvement program in the school.



### Summary of Project Strengths and Weaknesses

Lack of communication was the project weakness most frequently mentioned by liaisons, principals and project administrators. Liaisons said that internal and external communication should be improved. They suggested improved central project-liaison communication and increased interaction among liaisons. In addition, they recommended that there be regular interaction between liaisons and others, i.e., UFT Chapter Chairpersons, principals, and Title IV-C Advisory Committee members. Project administrators noted the need for improved overall communication and principals felt that communication problems between themselves and the project could be improved by a newsletter or by more frequent meetings.

Project administrators and liaisons felt that another weakness was the lack of supervisory support provided to liaisons. Half of the liaisons and several principals also cited the need to clarify the project design.

Other weaknesses mentioned by several liaisons included the lack of long-range planning and the need for the use of individual liaison talents. Liaisons and project administrators also indicated a need for support from the central Board administrators. Problems concerning the payment of committee members were mentioned by several principals.

Liaisons, principals and project administrators all mentioned project services and resources as a major program strength. Liaisons specified services, project administrators specified the service orientation of the project, and principals mentioned liaisons' services and instructional materials and supplies provided by the program.

The conceptual base and the goals of the project were also seen as strengths by most liaisons and by project administrators. Half of the principals and liaisons mentioned the school-based activities and the constituency involvement in the planning process as strengths. Another strength noted by more than half of the liaisons was the school needs assessment. Liaisons and project administrators both felt that the facilitation of improved communication within the schools had been a major project accomplishment.

### Quality of Project Participation

#### Principals' Views

When asked whether they felt that participation in the School Improvement Project had been a positive experience for the school, seven principals responded positively, two negatively, and one gave a mixed response.

Of the seven principals who answered affirmatively, four felt that the school assessment component of the program had been positive, two emphasized the opportunity for the school to be involved in a self-evaluation, one stressed the focused nature of the five school-effectiveness factors, and one principal noted in particular the non-partial evaluator role played by the liaison. Two principals felt positively about the project's effect on communication in the school: the project improved communication between the principal and staff and gave the staff a sounding board, and the open communication fostered greater understanding of the total operation of a school by those who participated on the committee. One principal mentioned that the project gave staff, for the first time, an opportunity to create policy and select instructional

materials. This principal also felt that the project took a "dead" staff and gave it life.

Two principals indicated that they did not believe that the project had been a positive experience for the school. One of these principals further explained that although the experience had been self-revealing for the school, the staff was resistant, fearful, and not prepared for the process.

The principal who felt that the project had been both negative and positive for his school expressed the feeling that a better reading of the project's effect would be possible in the coming year as the improvement plan is implemented.

When asked whether they would continue to participate in the project next year, seven principals responded "Yes" and one responded "No." This latter principal was one of the principals who stated that the project had been a negative experience for the school.

#### Planning Committees

Ninety-four percent of planning committee members who answered this item indicated that they would continue to participate on the committee in the coming year. Affirmative responses ranged from 85.7% to 100%. In five schools, 100% of those responding indicated a desire to continue serving on the committee.

When asked whether the project had been a positive experience for the school, 95.2% of the committee members responding answered "Yes." In seven of the eight schools, 100% of the respondents felt this way, and in one school, 66.7% of the committee members indicated that participation had been a positive experience for the school.

### School Communities

Seventy-five percent of all respondents to the School Questionnaire indicated that participation in the project had been a positive experience for the school. The range of affirmative responses by individual school communities was from 41.2% to 100%. In only two schools out of the six were positive responses below 87%.

In summary, the majority of principals felt that participation in the project had been a positive experience for the school. The reasons most often given by principals for this feeling were the school assessment component of the project and improved school communications. The great majority of committee members and three-quarters of the participating school community also indicated that participation had been a positive experience for the school.

All but one principal expressed an intention to continue participating in the project in 1980-81. Almost all committee members indicated that they would continue to serve on their school planning committees.



## IX. CONCLUSION

Fourteen elementary schools (ten public and four non-public) participated in the School Improvement Project during the 1979-80 school year. Of the ten public schools, eight completed the needs assessment, committee formation and plan development phases of the project, one school left the project following committee formation, and one school suspended committee meetings but will be resuming them in the fall. Of the four non-public schools, three schools completed the needs assessment phase, and one school also completed the committee formation phase.

Over the course of the first year, the project experienced many growing pains. In this section the project's accomplishments, concerns, and issues discussed in greater detail in previous sections of this report will be briefly reviewed. Conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter are based upon the results of the assessment as well as the observations of the Documentation Unit as it closely monitored project activities over the course of the year.

### School Selection/Project Introduction

The absence of staff and parent involvement in the decision to participate in the project, and the general lack of project orientation sessions prior to introduction of the program, generated much anxiety and resentment in a number of the schools. A clear explanation of project goals and components to all school constituencies is crucial to avoid misinterpretation of program intentions and to establish an "understanding of exactly what the school is getting into."

Input by all constituencies regarding school participation is also critical to project success. If all school constituencies are not



committed to, and prepared for, the process of self-evaluation and self-improvement, significant change is not likely to occur in that school building.

Eight new schools are scheduled to join the project in the fall, 1980. In introducing the program to these schools during the selection process in the spring, project staff made every attempt to insure that all constituencies understood and demonstrated a commitment to the project goals and activities. Prior to actual implementation of the program in the fall, another meeting will be held with the entire school community of each school to gauge its continue interest in the project.

#### The School Needs Assessment Process

Overall, the response to the school needs assessment process was positive, particularly in regard to the comprehensive nature of the school evaluation and the usefulness of having the assistance of an objective outsider (the liaison) in conducting the assessment. Recommendations for modification of the school assessment were made regarding the length of time it took to complete the process, and the format of the Needs Assessment Report.

To shorten the time required to complete the needs assessment, data collection activities will be revised and future Needs Assessment Reports will be largely tabular and statistical, rather than narrative, in format. Also in terms of revision of the report format, when liaison observations are to be included in the report they will be clearly indicated as such; direct quotes of respondents will not be included, and, to further insure respondent anonymity, small staff sub-groups (cluster, reimbursable, etc.) will not be identified.

The issue regarding the dissemination of the Needs Assessment Report was clearly the most problematic aspect of this phase of the project. The project administrator's concern with protecting the confidentiality of respondents and limiting the dissemination of report results prompted the restrictive report distribution policy adopted by the project. However, a number of liaisons, principals and other project participants have recommended a much wider report distribution practice. In addition, if a largely statistical Needs Assessment Report format is used by the project in the future, it appears that these reports will be considered public documents; statistical tabulations of data are not protected under the Freedom of Information Law, and access to them cannot be restricted.

The school reaction to the results of the needs assessment appears to be one of the clearest indicators of the school's readiness to continue with the change process. Acceptance of the need for change must occur before problems can be honestly and actively addressed. Again, complete understanding by all school constituencies of the needs assessment process, particularly the blunt reality of the assessment results, is necessary to ensure ongoing school commitment and to prepare schools for the project.

#### Committee Formation

The project allowed for flexibility in the formation of committees. There seemed to be no preferred method of committee formation among the approaches taken by the principals, i.e., election, selection or the soliciting of volunteers. However, two characteristics which appear to be key to successful committee formation are support by all school

constituencies for the method chosen, and use of a method which results in a committee that is fairly representative of all of the constituencies which make up the school.

#### Committee Meetings and Plan Development

The project designed a successful plan development process and a simple but effective format for the School Improvement Plan. It is no minor accomplishment that eight schools have been involved in and have completed a participatory planning process which resulted in relatively comprehensive school plans.

There are a number of unresolved issues which have surfaced regarding the committee planning process. Should committee members be paid for participation? If yes, should payment for all participant groups be equitable? There is also a need for increased parent involvement in the school planning process. Many schools had only one or two parent committee members and some committees had no parent representatives. In addition, more than the allotted 12 committee meeting sessions seem to be necessary to develop a school plan. Finally, if school-based constituency planning is to be encouraged throughout the New York City school system, a formal mechanism for group planning time must be provided.

#### Implementation of the Improvement Plan

Eight public schools will begin to implement the activities outlined in their school plans in September, 1980. It is anticipated that another public school and three of the non-public schools will be prepared to implement plan activities by the middle of the school year.

The project administration has stated that there is a possibility that committee members who are willing to assume responsibility for the

supervision and implementation of various activities outlined in the plan will be paid a stipend by the project. However, it is clear that the time and energy needed to implement the plans will demand more of administrators, staff and parents than monetary compensation can justify. In addition, the assigned liaison will no longer be available to the school on a full-time basis next year. The real commitment of the schools to the process will be tested over the coming school year.

What support can be expected in terms of resources and services from the local school district and the central Board in meeting identified school needs? Will the promised delivery of services and support to the project schools be forthcoming from the State Education Department? The quality of support received by project schools from the district, city and state education agencies will demonstrate the ability and commitment of the various levels of those systems to respond to locally identified school needs.

Undoubtedly, problems will arise as the project and schools enter this phase of the program process for the first time. However, if the project continues to maintain flexibility and openness in its approach, mistakes will become a learning and developmental experience and any resulting project modifications will make the program that much more effective and viable.

#### Project Communication, Training, and Field Supervision

Communications, both internal and external, constituted a problematic feature of the project this year. The frequency of project principal meetings should be increased, and closer attention must be given to the content of the meetings. Greater emphasis on professional development activities, perhaps by an outside consultant group, in areas identified by the principals is one possibility.



Regular project meetings of UFT Chapter Chairpersons and of parent representatives may be necessary. Inclusion of the liaisons, or a liaison representative, may also be advisable at meetings of the Title IV-C Advisory Committee, and at project meetings with principals, parent representatives, and UFT Chapter Chairpersons. Two or three city-wide meetings of all project staff and participants would also serve to facilitate overall project communication and sharing of experiences.

Liaisons expressed a desire for greater involvement in ongoing program development and training. An increased emphasis on liaison staff meetings, which provide an opportunity for sharing of experiences and concerns, is also needed. The utilization of individual liaison talents, when possible, to address project training needs and needs of project schools, was another practice that the liaisons felt the project should adopt.

Liaisons also voiced a desire for increased field supervision and more contact with project administrators. These requests appear to grow out of the general isolation liaisons experienced in the schools, and the need for demonstrated support for their activities in the schools. Regardless of how often the liaisons demonstrated their professional expertise, the power of their role lies with the school's view of them as agents of the central Board. Therefore, the absence of visible support on a regular basis for the liaison's activities reduce his or her credibility in the eyes of the school community.

#### Project Clarity

Many project participants expressed the need for greater clarification of project goals and activities. While this may be a result of



poor project communication, it is also most certainly due to the developmental and innovative nature of the project. Several project activities had to be implemented on a trial-and-error basis. Often decisions were based on an educated guess because there was no previous experience to use as a reference.

Greater program clarity, however, should be apparent during the needs assessment, committee formation, and plan development phases of the project as they are implemented for a second time in a new set of schools. Project revision should be seen as an ongoing and healthy process as the program continues to evolve over the coming years.

#### Non-Public School Involvement

At present, four non-public schools are scheduled to participate in the project next year: two schools from the Diocese of Brooklyn, one school from the Archdiocese of New York, and one school from the Board of Jewish Education. It is apparent that the non-public school component should be better integrated at participating public schools, particularly various school meetings. There is also a need to determine the availability of various city and state resources and services to the participating non-public schools. This is a legal issue which must be resolved so that the project's commitment to these schools can be clarified.

#### Involvement of the District Superintendent

The involvement of the District Superintendents in the project has been minimal largely due to the absence of project-initiated contact or significant inclusion of the Superintendent's role in the program design. However, throughout the project phases superintendent input is clearly needed. During the School Selection/Project Introduction phase of the

project, for example, Superintendents should have greater input into the selection of schools in their districts, and should also be involved in the initial introduction of the program to their district schools as a demonstration of their support for the project. District Superintendents should review initial drafts of the improvement plan and be asked for input and support for the activities outlined in the plan. The Superintendent should be asked to demonstrate his or her support for the improvement plan through the provision of available district resources and services during plan implementation. Finally, increased involvement by the Superintendents' representative on the Title IV-C Advisory Committee, which serves as a policy review panel to the project, is a necessity if the project concerns of Superintendents are to be heard.

#### Central Board Project Support

The general lack of visible support from the central Board administration for the project appeared to reduce the strength and public credibility of the program, as well as hurt staff morale. The priority placed on the delivery of central Board resources and services to project schools in the coming year will indicate whether the central administration has developed a renewed interest in the School Improvement Project.

#### Strengths and Accomplishments of the Project

The achievements of the School Improvement Project over the course of the first year of implementation have been numerous and significant. The program has developed a school needs assessment process and a constituency planning process which work. Positive effects on communication and relations in participating schools have been noted. The

program staff have demonstrated their personal strength and professional expertise through a rather tough first year. The action and service orientation of the project has undoubtedly been communicated to the schools based on the desire of almost all participants to continue with the program, and the feeling expressed by the vast majority of participants that involvement in the project was a positive experience for their school.

Finally, the project represents a program which is both philosophically and conceptually sound and practical for the New York City school system. Project activities occur at the school level, which ensures that school constituents will be involved and that real school needs will be addressed. The changes that the project attempts to facilitate in the schools are based on a school self-improvement process which occurs internally, not from outside the school, and is owned and controlled by the school community. The program emphasizes democratic school community participation and decision-making. Most importantly, the project directs the attention of participants to instructional, curricular, and administrative needs of the schools through the practice of ongoing planning and evaluation.

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